SRI RAMANA LEELA

(A BIOGRAPHY OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI)

Telugu original

Sri Krishna Bhikshu

Edited and Translated by

Pingali Surya Sundaram

Sri Ramanasramam

Tiruvannamalai

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Publisher's Note

S*RI Ramana Leela* in Telugu was one of the three biographies of Sri Ramana Maharshi published during Sri Bhagavan's physical presence at Sri Ramanasramam. The other two biographies were *Self Realisation* (English) and *Sri Ramana Vijayam* (Tamil).

The Telugu book was authoured by Sri Kirshna Bhikshu (1904 - 1981), whose original name was Oruganti Venkata Krishnayya. A qualified lawyer, he was also a Government official and a frequent visitor to Sri Ramanasramam right from the early 1930s.

Sri Ramana Leela was first published in 1936 and was revised over a period of time in subsequent editions.

As the book has some very valuable details about Sri Bhagavan, especially of his works, we have thought it appropriate to place it before a larger audience; hence this translation.

We hope that this biography will be a welcome addition to the large body of Ramana literature in English.

Tiruvannamalai — **President**
8 January 2003 — Sri Ramanasramam

Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

Translator's Note

Sri Bhagavan's ways are inscrutable. Just at a time when I thought that my brief foray into the literary world had come to an end after a little over a decade, I got a long-distance call from the President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V.S.Ramanan, asking me to undertake an English translation of Sri Krishna Bhikshu's Telugu biography of Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Sri Ramana Leela*. I took this as a command of Sri Bhagavan and immediately agreed to take up the assignment, though I was aware that it was a formidable task. I was secure in the belief that Sri Bhagavan would ensure the completion of the job.

A little before this assignment came my way I attempted to read this very book and gave it up as being too tough for me. Sri Krishna Bhikshu's book, first published in 1936 and subsequently revised, is written in a highly classical and Sanskritised style preferred by scholars and *pandits* of his time. It is replete with several passages which to me appeared to be abstruse and convoluted. Also at several places, the narration does not proceed in a smooth and logical manner. This style of writing has largely gone into disuse.

In attempting to translate the book I was faced with many difficult choices and finally concluded that what I

should attempt is not a literal translation but one which is closely faithful to the original. For this purpose I had to paraphrase many passages, re-arrange certain paragraphs and generally make the book readable. It is for the readers to judge whether I have succeeded or not.

In this endeavour I have received generous help from Prof Mohan Ramanan, of the Department of English, University of Hyderabad and my daughter, Dr. P. Sailaja, of the same Department. Neither of them has gone through the Telugu original and the numerous useful suggestions they gave after going through the manuscript have provided an invaluable input. Also, the original abounds in Sanskrit quotations which were explained to me by Dr. Poranki Dakshinamurty, former Deputy Director, Telugu Academy, Hyderabad. My grateful thanks to all of them. I also wish to thank Sri V.S. Ramanan who has given me this opportunity in the first place. May Sri Bhagavan shower them with His grace.

This book is the result of Sri Bhagavan's *anugraha.* In all humility, I offer it to Him with all its blemishes, confident that with His characteristic graciousness, kindness and indulgence He will deign to accept it.

HYDERABAD — P.S. SUNDARAM

17 - JULY' 03

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I. The Advent

IT was the *Ardra darshan* celebrated as the day when Siva showed his *ananda-tandava* (dance of bliss) to Patanjali and others at Chidambaram in fulfillment of a promise made to Adisesha at Daruka forest. In the village of Tiruchuzhi, Bhoominatheswara along with his consort Sahayamba, was about to enter his abode after going round the streets of the village blessing his devotees.

To the northeast of the temple was the house of Sundaram Iyer, whose wife Alagamma was in labour to deliver her third child. Lakshmi Ammal the mother of Sundaram Iyer and an old lady of poor eyesight, their neighbour, were in the room.*

That was December 29, 1879 well past midnight, hence it was December 30. The moon was in the constellation of Punarvasu. Bhoominatha halted a little while at the entrance of the temple and there in the house a male child was born. Sundaram Iyer's mother was disappointed and gave expression to it. The lady of poor sight asked the reason for her disappointment to which she replied, "You know very well that my daughter Lakshmi is no more, her

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* This house has since been taken over by the management of Sri Ramanasramam and is known as Sundara Mandiram. Daily worship is offered to Sri Ramana's picture here.

son Ramaswami is growing up here. The first child was a girl who has gone. The second is Nagaswami. Now again it is a boy. If the child had been a girl we could have married her off to my daughter's son. Where is the chance now? How will the family tie continue? This is all I am destined for!" The old lady admonished her and consoled her, "Enough of this, be quiet. The boy is a darling. He is enveloped in great light. Don't you see, he is an *avatar?* How can you weep over this?"

How did that lady of poor sight know?

According to the solar calendar it was the 16th day of Margazhi of Pramadi year. According to the Lunar calendar it was Pramadi, Margaseersha, Krishna paksha (dark fortnight) 2nd day, night 19 1/2 ghadis, Tula lagna.

2. The Family

THE family Deity was Sri Venkateswara. Sundaram Iyer's elder brother was named after him as Venkateswara Iyer – a fine person who used to offer half of his earnings to the goddess Sahayamba. He became disinterested in worldly affairs even by the time he was eighteen. Saying that he would pay a visit to Tirupparankundram near Madurai he left home for good. He lived as a renunciate at Chidambaram and spent his time cleaning up the pathways surrounding the temple, for the benefit of devotees. The new born was named Venkateswara after the paternal uncle and the family Deity.

One of Sundaram Iyer's paternal uncles was also a renunciate by name Sivananda Yogi, which was why when his father, Nagaswami Iyer passed away before the children came of age, the burden of the family fell on Sundaram Iyer. As a boy of sixteen he took up a job as a clerk on a monthly wage of two rupees. Intelligent, hardworking and popular he quickly learnt how to draft legal documents. He was tactful in his dealings with the officials as well as common people. Even without appearing for any tests he obtained a licence to be a pleader, a facility then available. He quickly established himself and became prosperous. He built a large house which had two portions – one to serve his domestic needs and the other to be a guest house.

Officials who were posted to Tiruchuzhi stayed there until they secured their own accommodation.

Sundaram Iyer knew what hardship was and so his was an open house for the needy. Alagamma never turned away anyone who needed food. She was Goddess Annapoorna herself! The couple became well known for their goodness, generosity and appropriate conduct. In fact both the words Sundaram and Alagu mean the same – beauty!

In the house, regular worship of Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa, Surya and Sakti was carried out. As one of the village elders Sundaram Iyer helped in organizing *purana-kalakshepas* at the temple and was generally helpful in temple affairs also. He never went about exhibiting his devotion openly, possibly he had a preference for the *jnana-marga*. He was of a serious temperament and was not quite free with or very close to his wife, brothers or children. Alagamma, on the other hand was quite open about her devotion – she went about reciting the Dakshinamurti *stotra* and similar Vedantic hymns. She made it a point to learn as many devotional songs as possible and used to go to anybody's house in the village to learn a new song. She got initiated into the *sakti-panchakshari japa*. She was quite orthodox and performed Surya *namaskaras* regularly.

Sundaram Iyer's family belonged to the Dravida, Smarta, Brahacharana lineage. They followed the Yajus *sakha*, Apasthamba *sutras*. They belonged to the Parasara *gotra* with Vasista sakti Parasara rishis. Their family name was Tiruchuzhi.

3. Childhood

THE child Venkateswara was unique. He seldom spoke or quarrelled. There was a close relative, Meenakshi of his age. He would not suckle his mother's breast if Meenakshi did not also suckle milk; he was so indifferent about his feeding. He had a sweet and gentle smile but behind it was a determined nature.

While admitting him in school in due course, his name was noted as Venkataraman. This name stuck. Lakshmana Iyer a close relative of the family was well-versed in Telugu. He used to address the child as Ramana or on occasion as "Nayana Ramani". "Nayana" in Telugu literally means father but is also used as an expression of endearment. The child adopted the Telugu tradition and addressed his father as Nayana, unlike the rest. In course of time the other members also adopted this mode of addressing. This extended to outsiders as well, all of whom began addressing Sundaram Iyer as "Nayana."

Venkataraman always had his way. One day, Sundaram Iyer set out from his house on business. He placed two pillows in a cart. The child remarked, "Nayana, the first pillow will drop off." The father ignored this and went away. In a little while, the child's prophecy came true. Sundaram Iyer was astonished – how could the boy know beforehand?

In his eighth year Venkataraman had his *upanayana*. He learnt to say in the ancient traditional way, “I, Venkateswara Sarma pay obeisance.”

The school in which Venkataraman was admitted was run in a *mantapa*. The head master was one Madhura Nayagam Pillai. Only Tamil was taught there up to the fifth standard.* Sundaram Iyer wanted his sons to be educated in English so that they could get into government service. But at Tiruchuzhi nobody taught English.

Sundaram Iyer had two younger brothers – the elder one among them, Subbu Iyer, was a clerk in the Sub-Registrar’s office at Dindigul. There was a Hindu School at Dindigul where English was taught. Nagaswami was put in that school. Venkataraman also was sent there in 1891 to join the sixth standard.

The brothers were like Rama and Lakshmana (who had the support of the monkeys). These brothers had the support of a group of young boys! They were friendly and healthy. The elder one was an adept at jumping on the tree branches, and was nicknamed “monkey.” The younger one was always a winner and came to be known as one with a golden touch or with a golden hand (*thanga-kai*) reminding us of one of the several names of Siva, “Hiranyabahu” (Golden armed). The brothers were interested in gymnastics, wrestling and football. The younger one simply followed his brother – he had no particular preferences. If provoked to a fight, he was unsparing which was why even those

* The nomenclature of classes was different during those days.

older than him left him alone. Venkataraman was never afraid of being beaten up either.

Venkataraman was a sound sleeper. At Dindigul, their house was in Abhirami Amman Kovil street. On a birthday of Srinivas, son of Subbu Iyer, after the evening meal was got ready, the rest of the family went to the temple leaving Venkataraman to look after the house. A little later, he bolted the door and fell asleep. The family returned late in the night and knocked at the door but there was no response. They pounded on the door and made a lot of noise which brought forth several neighbours on the scene but all of this was of no avail. Everyone was wondering as to what had happened to Venkataraman. After several attempts they succeeded in opening the door. Thereafter they gathered round Venkataraman and tried various means to wake him up. They wondered at his sound sleep and likened him to the legendary Kumbhakarna. Getting to know about this quality of his, some schoolmates who were earlier beaten up by Venkataraman but were afraid to retaliate, would take him while asleep to a lonely spot, thrash him and bring him back to his bed. By their words and hints on the following day, Venkataraman would guess what had transpired the previous night. As mistaken by some, that movement of Venkataraman during sleep was not due to somnambulism.

Sakti (power) is of two types – one is mental, the other practical. During deep sleep these lie dormant in the body and do not get dissipated as in the waking state. That is the reason why the body becomes energetic as

soon as it awakens. Owing to the *sadhaka's* will *sakti* does not get wasted externally through the sense organs; it becomes turned inward towards the Self. Deep sleep is involuntary, hence it is a state of ignorance. On the other hand, Samadhi is voluntary and is a state of knowledge. For Ramana, the body was able, through this deep sleep state to sustain a state of *tapas* in later years.

Neither of the brothers was particularly interested in studies. Maybe, the elder one was a little better. The younger one, on the other hand, remembered that there was such a thing as education only upon seeing the teacher's face! However, he had the faculty of committing to memory anything he heard once. But he took particular care to memorise Tamil poems. He never aspired to become a scholar nor did anyone expect him to become one.

Subbu Iyer was transferred to Madurai in 1891. The brothers also moved with him. They were admitted in the Scott Middle School in the North Avani Street. Their residence was in North Chitrai Street.

4. The Dawn

SKIRTING Tiruchuzhi on the North Eastern and South Eastern sides is the Kaundinya river famed as the Redeemer of Sins. During a famine, the *rishi* Kaundinya performed *tapas* of Siva and this river was born. The king of Malva, Somasila, was a leper. He heard of this river as a Redeemer of Sins and bathed there. True to its name, the river cured him of leprosy. Such is the legend. The Tiruchuzhi tank had a peculiar feature. The water level of the tank was higher than the ground level of the town; yet the water never overflowed. Opposite the temple, there was a water bed known as *Soola tirtham*. The legend goes that during the deluge Lord Siva lifted that piece of land with his trident to save it from getting submerged. The water bed arose out of that – all the water sank into that space. Because of this water-bed the place got its name Tiru (sacred) chuzhi (swirl). The *Soola-tirtham* is to the east of the *mantapa* in the temple tank. During the month of Magha the water level of the tank would rise step by step and on the tenth day the tank would be full. Siva in the *mantapa* was thus given his *abhisheka*. Thereafter, the water level would go down during the next ten days. This was an unfailing phenomenon irrespective of the intensity of the rainfall. The water level here had nothing to do with the level of water in

the town's wells. A bath in the waters of *Soola tirtham* would cure several skin ailments.

Sundaram Iyer bought a piece of land on the North Eastern end of the town and donated it to the public, to serve as a cremation ground.

In 1892 Sundaram Iyer fell ill. Subbu Iyer, along with his nephews visited him. But within four days he passed away. By then he was forty seven. Sundaram Iyer was cremated at the very ground donated by him.

Sundaram Iyer was popular and well-respected – even by way-laying robbers. He left behind four children – Nagaswami the eldest was fourteen, Venkataraman was twelve, Nagasundaram six and Alamelu was an infant. After the ceremonies Subbu Iyer returned to Madurai along with Nagaswami and Venkataraman whereas Alagamma stayed back with her two younger children. Their responsibility was taken over by Nelliappa Iyer, younger brother of Subbu Iyer.

After this calamity, Nagaswami began bestowing greater attention on his studies; but there was no change in Venkataraman at all. In addition to his old sports he learnt to swim either in the river Vaigai or in the Pillayar Tank. Also he learnt to throw and catch a small vessel full of water as if it were a ball without spilling even a drop of water. To indulge in their midnight games at the Vaigai the boys used to cover the bed with pillows which in turn were covered up by mattresses to give the impression that someone was asleep. They would jump over the wall and melt in the darkness outside. There was a garden close by

and near its compound wall each member of the team used to leave a small stone to indicate that he was on his way to the Vaigai. The boys played till about two or three in the early hours and returned home. Apart from this, swimming in the swirling waters of the Vaigai during floods was another favourite sport of the boys.

From his very childhood, Venkataraman's words had an authority of their own. Abdul Wahab, a Muslim, was the captain of the football team of the boys. Once Venkataraman went to Wahab's house and on learning that they ate non-vegetarian food, expressed his revulsion. With that pronouncement, Wahab gave up non-vegetarian food forever! Wahab later served in the Police Department and retired as a Superintendent of Police.

Subbu Iyer moved over to a house in Chokkappa Naicken street.*

For his ninth standard, Venkataraman joined the American Mission High School. The college run by the same Mission was in its neighbourhood. Life was as usual, listless and aimless. He would visit Tiruchuzhi during vacations.

It was November 1895, Venkataraman was a student of ninth standard. He was on his way to the school at about ten in the morning, when he ran into Ramaswami Iyer, son of Lakshmana Iyer's brother – a resident of Tiruchuzhi. He was their relative, elderly too. Venkataraman, with natural affection, asked him, "Where

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* This house has now been taken over by Sri Ramanasramam and is named "Ramana Mandiram". Daily pooja is performed here.

are you coming from?" The reply was "From Arunachala." The word "Arunachala" was familiar to Venkataraman from his younger days, but he did not know where it was, what it looked like or what it meant. Yet that day that word meant to him something great, an inaccessible, authoritative, absolutely blissful entity. Could one visit such a place? His heart was full of joy. Arunachala meant some sacred land, every particle of which gave *moksha*. It was omnipotent and peaceful. Could one behold it?

"What? Arunachala? Where is it?" asked the lad. The relative was astonished, "Don't you know even this?" and continued, "Haven't you heard of Tiruvannamalai? That is Arunachala." It was as if a balloon was pricked, the boy's heart sank.

Venkataraman had heard the name any number of times. Yet he was never moved. Why did it happen then?

No spiritual stirring had ever showed itself in Venkataraman's life till then. There were occasions when he had trifled with *pooja* articles too. He was so irreverent. He worshipped Siva routinely, visited temples on holy days as a formality but not because of any inner urge.

Once, on a night of festivities the boys went to Tirupparankundram. They were hungry but food was yet to be served. They hung around the kitchen. Just then the temple official went out on an errand. The boys opened the lock of the door, went in and took as much food as they wanted and went away to the river bank, had their fill, left behind the rest, washed themselves and went back to partake of the food being served! That was the

boy's *prasadam*. Normally, nobody touches the food before it is offered to the deity because it is considered improper to do so. Long after this event Bhagavan said, "The food was indeed offered." How true it is! It was offered to the one for whom it was intended!

The Bible was taught at the school. Venkataraman was not interested even in the secular education imparted there – what to speak of the Bible?

Yet how did the emotional upsurge arise? What was the relation between Arunachala and Venkataraman?

5. Earlier Attachment

ONE or two months later Venkataraman chanced upon *Periapuranam* borrowed by Subbu Iyer from some one. The epic was authored in the following circumstances.

The ruler of the Chola territory, Anapaya Chola was a Jain and a tormentor of Saivites. One of those thus tormented was the poet Sekkizhar. "Did not Tirunavukkarasar (Appar) give away in charity all his patrimony and take to Jainism? Did he not reconvert to Saivism due to the ministrations of his sister? Why did not some such thing happen to the king? This is Siva's territory and there are twelve *kshetras*, six *kumarasthanas*, five *lingas* each of an element and 1008 *Sivasthanas*. The great Nayanmars devoted their entire lives to the praise of Siva, they revelled in the very thought of the magnificent form of Siva, they looked upon themselves as just specks of dust at the feet of Siva and extolling Siva, sang songs which gave great joy to the common populace. Won't this king get converted on hearing the stories of these devotees? I shall enshrine them in a book," thought Sekkizhar and took up the work. But alas, no word came out of him. He wept bitterly and prayed to Siva in utter helplessness. Siva himself spelt out the first word – thereafter Sekkizhar's devotion poured out, as Siva's grace, and resulted in

Periapuranam. The poet recited this to the Chola king in the presence of Nataraja and was blessed.

The first religious text that Venkataraman read was *Periapuranam*. It was as if he entered a new world altogether. The more he read the greater was his thirst. The Lord of Time was the monarch therein hence there was no fear of time. The subjects were all contented devotees of Siva. Devotion, love, peace, and bliss flooded all over as knowledge of Siva himself.

As he was progressing, Venkataraman's devotion and reverence for the devotees was increasing – he grieved at their travails and rejoiced in their triumphs. Venkataraman felt that Siva was glancing at him also just as he beheld the devotees. On completion of the book his emotional upsurge vanished, Venkataraman became his usual self. He seemed to have forgotten all those devotees and had given up all thought of following them.

Venkataraman's life was flowing like a deep unruffled stream – of course, there were occasional whirlpools. He was very sensitive and could bear no rebuke. When he was young, Sundaram Iyer reprimanded him once at Tiruchuzhi. The boy was deeply hurt. He did not turn up at mealtime. A prolonged search ensued. He was found in the Sahayamba shrine – possibly, he went there seeking the comfort of the Mother's lap. Such incidents did occur.

Venkataraman was naturally of a helpful disposition. He assisted his mother and aunt in their household chores. Several mistook this characteristic and ridiculed him as an effeminate person. Some psychologists hold that only

a person both with feminine and masculine qualities in equal measure can become a redeemer of humanity. Peace, grace, love and sympathy are feminine qualities whereas determination, courage and strength are masculine qualities. A complete or glorious life cannot be had without an adequate representation of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Can we think of anyone more graceful and at the same time more courageous than Sri Krishna? Is not Easwara an "*ardha nareeswara*?" A completely soft nature is like a creeper that cannot survive on its own. Similarly, an unyielding courage is like a wooden staff with no sap. Venkataraman's nature was a combination of both, which was why he became a redeemer of humanity.

6. Rebirth

ONE year passed by, life went on as usual. In 1895, Nelliappa Iyer left Tiruchuzhi for Manamadurai where he settled down as a secondry grade pleader. In the summer of 1896 both Venkataraman and his brother visited the place.

In 1896, Nagaswami married Janaki Ammal. His in-laws also lived in Madurai. Venkataraman was in his seventeenth year and in his tenth standard, preparing for the public examination. Though not quite studious he had no fear of the examination. He enjoyed games which made him robust and healthy. It was mid-July. One afternoon, Venkataraman was lying in the first floor room when, for no apparent reason, he had a sudden fright that he would die; "I am dying," he thought. Years later, Bhagavan narrated the experience in the following manner –

"There was no reason for me to think like that. I did not even know what that state was nor why I was afraid. It did not occur to me that I should consult either a doctor or some elders. The only problem for me was what death meant and how it could be avoided. I resolved to solve it at once. Death meant that the limbs stiffened, lips tightened, eyes closed and breath stopped. By intense thinking, all this came to be experienced. But neither memory nor awareness disappeared. In other words, the sense organs ceased to

operate externally and an inward look established itself. Even if the body died, the sense of 'I' did not go. The consciousness of individuality was very much there. When the body was taken to the graveyard and reduced to ashes 'I' did not perish because 'I' was not the body.

"The body was inanimate and without knowledge but I had knowledge. Therefore death was for the inanimate body whereas 'I' was imperishable and was consciousness.

"The knowledge one had when the body and senses ceased to function was not the product of the senses. The awareness of 'I' was direct, self luminous and not a product of any thought. The entity which survived death was consciousness."

Thus in a trice, Venkataraman had new knowledge.

Though the experience was described step by step, it all happened in a flash. With neither the guidance of a *guru* nor any *abhyasa*, did any other *yogi* obtain that knowledge?

The *Bhagavad Gita* says:

manusyanam sahasresu kascid yatati siddhaye!
Yatatam api siddhanam kascin mam vetti tattvatah (vii.3)

(Among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection and of those who strive and succeed, scarcely one knows Me in truth)

– Tr. Swami Chidbhavananda

That knowledge is unprecedented. Such a person is born with a purpose, he is an *avatar* and a teacher.

About the knowledge of the *Atman*, *Katha Upanishad* says:

Nayamatma pravacanena labhyo
na medhaya na bahuna srutena
Yamevaisa vrnute tena labhyah
tasyaisa atma vivrnute tanu svam- (2.23)

(This *Atman* cannot be attained by study of the scriptures, nor by sharp intellect, nor by much hearing; by him is It attained whom It chooses – to him this *Atman* reveals Its Own true form).

– Tr. Swami Ranganathananda

It is entirely appropriate that this miraculous event should occur at the seat of the consort of Siva and the source of all, Sakti Meenakshi. The Bhagavad Gita says that *para-prakriti sakti* dispels all ignorance. Ramana became Self aware by the grace of the divine power. Madurai is reputed as the *dvadasanta mahasthali*. (the place of the presiding Deity of the twelve sources of power, the chakras.)

By his direct perception Venkataraman had a re-birth and by his knowledge he attained *moksha* – simultaneously. He realized he was the imperishable "*Aham*." All fear of death left him.

Much later Bhagavan was to say in *Ulladu Narpadu* (*Reality in Forty Verses*), "When those who are in dread of death seek refuge at the feet of the deathless, birthless Lord Supreme, their Ego and Attachments die and they, now deathless, think no more of death."

– Tr. K. Swaminathan

7. Agony

HAVING tasted the bliss of the Self, Venkataraman ever abided in the Self and could bear nothing else, nor was anything else possible. Even if the body participated in some activity, thoughts were centred round the Self, he lost body-consciousness too. All this happened naturally and effortlessly.

Abidance in the Self and devotion were the two strands which governed Venkataraman's life. For one who abided in the Self what was the need for devotion to God? This is what Bhagavan had to say on this subject much later, "I was not aware that experience of the Self was categorized and described variously. I was not familiar with philosophic terms like "Brahman" nor what an attributeless Truth meant. I was not aware that the individual Self and Easwara were one. I had an awareness of Easwara but not that it was the *atma* itself. One cannot say whether the thought process (mind) became extinct or was in abeyance. The Self was being experienced without any effort. In a sense it was abidance in the Self. It was the experience of the unbroken *atma* in the words of Sankara. In *Jnana Vasishta* it is described as "*sattva pathi*."

"Did not Sankara and other self-realised persons worship God with attributes?" One moment it was

submergence in the *atma* at the next it was in God. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also confirmed the last stages of saints and sages to be similar.

"Other than *Periapuranam* I had not studied any other spiritual text by then. I had only heard of the Infinite Being with attributes as described therein. I had not heard of any attributeless Truth. Even while being conscious of the external world I was in the presence of Easwara – with no agony, or emotion," said the Swami.

Yogic ways are of two types – the internal and the external. The *jnana-marga* (path of wisdom) transcends the five sheaths of the body. Raja Yoga is control of mind, whereas Hatha yoga is control of breath. Among the external yogas, the *karma* and *bhakti margas* are the most important. They are easily available even to worldly-minded, ordinary people. Among them, the Sankhyas discriminate against the body and attain the attributeless Parabrahman. Or some become devotees, fix their heart on Easwara with attributes, serve him and consider that other than Easwara there is nothing else. For those like Suka who choose the *atma* as the goal as well as for those devotees who choose Easwara as the goal – the result is the same – it is the unification of the individual Self and Brahman.

Venkataraman who would earlier visit the temple of Meenakshi only on holy days now became a frequent visitor. On seeing the sport of Sundarareswarar painted in the thousand pillared hall Venkataraman "recollected the emotional upsurge experienced about one year ago on hearing the name of Arunachala." He also was to further

recall the life stories of the devotees which could not influence his life then. "I must also be full of *bhakti* like the Nayanmars, I thought, Easwara, my father at Arunachala, would grant me refuge at his feet. I would frequently visit the temple and in the presence of the images of the Deities and Nayanmars would be beside myself with emotion and would be tear-filled. I did not know what that agony or emotion was due to. All that I would pray for was that the Lord should make me His devotee, or a member of his retinue or one with unswerving devotion. I knew not whether it was joy or sorrow. Either I was in meditation or in that state of agony. My whole body was flooded with this emotion and had a burning sensation. On beholding the images a storm would rise in the mind. Possibly, because the thoughts lost their anchor of the body some other foothold was needed. That was the reason for visiting the temple so frequently. Sometimes, I prayed for mercy, at some other times even that was absent. Tears would stream down, sometimes I would be stupefied".

The only thing that showed itself outwardly in Venkataraman was the streaming of tears, he did not show any other visual characteristics of overwhelming *bhakti* such as dancing in ecstasy or a choked voice or fainting.

What was the cause for this turmoil? Was it due to some memory of an earlier *janma*? If so, what kind of experience did that earlier *janma* have?

8. The Command

BY nature, Venkataraman kept very much to himself and spoke little. Some marked changes occurred in him but neither his family members nor friends could guess what was going on in his mind. He no longer participated in games, nor sought the company of his friends. His visits to the Meenakshi temple were more frequent and he spent most of his time sitting quietly, with his eyes closed in meditation. His former sensitivity and quick reactions got blunted. He, who was formerly intolerant of any offensive remark became indifferent to any jibe. One who protested about any injustice no longer cared about any injustice heaped on him. His former sensitivity gave place to resignation. He no longer had any preferences in the matter of food. He became humble. He continued to attend to household chores but as a matter of routine. He took up his books but his mind was elsewhere. His interest in studies, never great, further slackened.

Such conduct naturally resulted in mild rebukes at first and ended up as punishments. His uncle and brother lamented, "What if he is intelligent, he has always shown very little interest in studies and to make matters worse, he now has these spiritual thoughts which are useless." Venkataraman's brother often made sarcastic remarks to

him and would say, "You sage, why do you have to bother about studies, you may as well go to the forests." Whatever be the goodwill and love of the relatives and however much they might wish for his worldly well-being, how could they approve of renunciation?

Beyond the home, in the external world also, Venkataraman faced opposition. His friends avoided him and sometimes ridiculed him. Venkataraman never retaliated, never responded. Some friends, however, had great regard for him and some feared him. The teachers reprimanded him and punished him.

To add to all these there was that burning sensation in different parts of his body. It left him restless and cooled down only when he sat in meditation. Facing hostility both at home and outside, Venkataraman developed aversion towards the world. His only love was for the Lord's feet. He thought that it would be nice if he were to die, but he had no such 'luck.' "When will the Lord show His mercy towards me," he often lamented.

It was Saturday, 29 August 1896 around eleven in the morning. As he did not study his grammar lesson, his teacher punished him asking him to copy a lesson from Bain's grammar text three times. Venkataraman sat in the room upstairs and began carrying out the imposition; with great effort he copied the lesson twice. "Am I a machine to carry out a task without any interest in it?," he asked himself.

The very next moment the writing stopped. He put aside the grammar text, took up a meditative posture and began to meditate.

Nagaswami, his brother, was closely observing all that. He could not tolerate it and without any premeditation he uttered these harsh, but true, words, "For one who behaves thus, what is the need for all this?"

Such taunts from his brother were not new to Venkataraman but this time they pierced his heart like a speeding arrow. "Yes it is true. I have no interest in studies, my interest lies elsewhere. When I cannot carry out any household responsibilities, why do I need a home at all? What business have I staying here?", thought Venkataraman and decided immediately to leave home for good.

But, what next, where to go or what was the support?

In a flash, "Arunachala" danced before his mental eye. About a year ago the Lord's Name throbbed in his heart but disappeared later. It appeared again that day. Once again the same thrill, the same devotion, the same emotional upsurge flooded him. He realized that the Father of the Universe would be his Father, his support and refuge.

Was it another flash in the heart that made him hear these words? Or was his Father beckoning him to come? If the Father were to stretch his arms could the son fail to rush into them? Run he must, to Arunachaleswara's Presence.

Much later Bhagavan himself said that he had left his home to seek refuge in Arunachaleswara and that some powerful, irresistible force brought him over.

> "I have discovered a new thing! This hill, the lodestone of lives, arrests the movements of anyone who so much as thinks of it, draws him face to face with it, and fixes him motionless like itself, to feed

upon his soul thus ripened. What (a wonder) is this! Oh Souls! Be aware of it and live! Such a destroyer is this magnificent Arunachala, which shines within the Heart!"

Verse 10, *Arunachala Padikam*
(Eleven Verses to Sri Arunachala)

9. Farewell

"THERE is no time to waste. I must reach the lap of Arunagireeswara. How to do so? Won't He show the way?", thought Venkataraman and got up at once. His brother asked him where he was off to. "I have a special class on Electricity at twelve. I have to attend it," replied Venkataraman. The brother said, "Very well, there are five rupees in the box downstairs. Take the keys from aunt and pay my college fees. After all, the college is close to your school." The brother was not at all aware that he was facilitating the journey of Venkataraman who must have thought that his Father was coming to his help. It also confirmed his feeling that his departure was at the command of his Father.

Venkataraman went down, hurriedly ate the meal served by his aunt and took the amount as directed by his brother.

How was he to know the way? He did not feel like asking anyone nor could anyone have guessed his plan. Years later, Bhagavan's class fellow Ranga Iyer had his *darshan*, prostrated before him and asked, "How is it that you did not even tell me that you were leaving home?" The reply was, "I myself did not know till I actually left the house." He consulted an old atlas and noticed that Tindivanam on the Villupuram-Madras railway section was the nearest

railhead to Arunachala. Actually, Tiruvannamalai station was on the Villupuram-Katpadi railway section laid about four years earlier – but it was not shown in the atlas. The fare for Tindivanam was three rupees. He took that amount and replaced two rupees in the box. He wrote a brief note addressed to his brother and placed it prominently in the box and embarked on his journey. This was what he wrote:

"I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over this affair. To trace this, no money need be spent.

Thus

- - - - - - - -

P.S. Your college fee has not been paid. Two rupees are enclosed."

This letter, some say is evidence of the steadily increasing Self knowledge. But was it so? The 'I' at the commencement is no indication of Venkataraman's identification with the body. To say so is to belittle his realization of the distinction between the body and Self, already acquired. His not signing the letter was not due to the absence of any individual doer. After all, he was in any case writing the letter. He was immersed in the formless entity. Therefore, it does not appear correct to assume that he had no consciousness of Venkataraman the individual. In the phrase "your .. fee" the distinction between 'me' and 'you' is obvious enough. The only things that are clear from the letter are Venkataraman's knowledge of the Self as distinct from the body, actions taking place without any particular

intention, and his anxiety to see that his relations were not inconvenienced on his account, a noble trait in itself!

Had the train arrived at the scheduled time of 12 noon at the station that day, Venkataraman would have missed it. It came one hour late, which was why, though he took time in walking the distance from home he did not miss the train.

Venkataraman thought that it was further proof of God himself attracting him like a magnet and resolving all inconvenient situations on the way. He bought a ticket to Tindivanam paying a little less than three rupees.* Had he seen the fare table a little below he would have noticed the Villupuram-Katpadi line and Tiruvannamalai station thereon. His mind was centred entirely on Arunachala and so he could not notice anything other than his goal. He did not want to ask anyone else as that could be a give-away. He was in a state of excitement and had no interest in any contact with others. He got into the train on its arrival and sat quietly, not speaking to anyone. The train sped on – he did not turn to look back at the beautiful city of Madurai nor at all those dear places where he had played since childhood.

Venkataraman sat, eyes closed, oblivious of his physical body or was it that his body was flying in the "inward sky?"

Along the banks of the South flowing Vaigai were green fields, coconut and mango groves all presenting a picture of Nature's bounty. Wasn't this beautiful earth a

* India did not have decimal coinage during those days. The amount paid by Venkataraman was Rs. 2-13-0 or about Rs. 2.80. He had about 20 paise left.

manifestation of Easwara? A little later came the Dindigul fort where Venkataraman played about in his younger days – there was only one game left for Venkataraman thereafter. This was to dwell in the ocean of blissful nectar! Such was Venkataraman's state; how could he look at Nature's beauty or his favourite haunts of bygone days?

10. The Great Journey

THE sun was setting. A *maulvi* seated in the same compartment was narrating the stories of different sages to his fellow passengers, who were absorbed in his narration. But this young man was indifferent, did not even open his eyes. Curious, the *maulvi* approached him and asked, "Swami, where are you going?"

Venkataraman : Tiruvannamalai.
Maulvi : I am also going there.
Venkataraman : Is it so?
Maulvi : Not exactly, but to Tirukkoilur the station adjacent to it.
Venkataraman : (Surprised) Is there a train to Tiruvannamalai?
Maulvi : Of course. To which station did you buy your ticket then?
Venkataraman : To Tindivanam.
Maulvi : Oh my! Why to Tindivanam? You have to get off at Villupuram and take another train that goes to Tirukkoilur and Tiruvannamalai.

The Father was lending a hand to lead His son! If not, why did the *maulvi* get into that very compartment? Why did he accost him and give him so many details?

Maybe, the one with matted hair, Siva, guided him. Gladdened, Venkataraman resumed his meditation.

By the time he reopened his eyes, darkness had enveloped all round, the train reached Tiruchchirapalli station. Quite strangely, the *maulvi* who said he was going to Tirukkoilur was not to be seen; equally strangely, until then Venkataraman was not hungry at all. It was dinner time and then he felt hungry – as if he was duty-bound to feel so. He bought two country apples and began to eat. He just had two bites by which time he felt satiated. This again, was quite strange. Normally he had a substantial meal but on that occasion a meagre meal sufficed.

He fell into meditation again. At the early hours of the next day the train reached Villupuram. Venkataraman got down and began looking for the way to Tiruvannamalai. He was hesitant to ask anybody. Yet his Father carried on his duty! As Venkataraman walked along he saw several guide posts one of which pointed towards "Mambalapattu". But he did not know that Mambalapattu was on the way to Tiruvannamalai.

He roamed about hungry and tired and reached a hotel where he was told that meals would be ready only by noon. He decided to wait and sat there and fell into meditation. The owner of the hotel was observing the lad who was bright, very fair with thick dark hair, earrings, without any luggage and lost to the world! Who could he be? By noon the food was ready; the hotel owner woke up Venkataraman and served him. Venkataraman offered to pay for it but the hotel owner declined to take it on

learning that Venkataraman had very little money. Maybe, that was the Lord's way of showing His grace!

With that meagre amount Venkataraman could buy a ticket to Mambalapattu. He travelled by train upto that point and then began walking. He walked on till it was quite dark. He reached Arayaninallur.

Arayaninallur, also known as Sivalankapuri, is a great pilgrim centre. On a small hillock near the village is situated the Atulyanatheswara Temple. The great poet-saint Jnana Sambandar sang in praise of Atulyanatheswar. He also consecrated an image of Arunachaleswara there. When Sambandar sat in meditation, Arunachaleswara appeared first as a column of light and later as an old Brahmin but Sambandar could not recognise him and made enquiries. The visitor replied that he belonged to Arunagiri and that he visited Arayaninallur every day to collect flowers for Arunachaleswara. Sambandar asked the Brahmin to take him also to Arunagiri to which he agreed. On the way, the Brahmin disappeared. A band of robbers surrounded Sambandar and his retinue and robbed them of their belongings. Sambandar was taken aback and prayed to the Lord, who revealed himself and told Sambandar that the robbers were part of His retinue (*ganas*). He promised to take him across if Sambandar stayed back as his guest for dinner and also offered to return all the articles stolen. Normally, Sambandar never ate without serving some guests but on that occasion, himself became a guest of Easwara. How Sambandar reached Arunachala and sang in praise of Arunachaleswara is a different story.

Tired and exhausted, Venkataraman reached the temple only to find the doors closed, as the priest had not arrived. He waited till the priest came. The priest went in and got involved in the *pooja*. Venkataraman walked in and settled down in a corridor, shut his eyes, opened his heart and began his mental *pooja* of Easwara. It was at that very spot that Jnana Sambandar saw the column. Sambandar was also barely sixteen when he had the experience.

All of a sudden, a bright light, from a source unknown to Venkataraman, enveloped him. He opened his eyes and saw nothing but bright light all around. He thought it could be the light of the Deity and walked towards the sanctum sanctorum. But by the time he reached it, the light vanished. The sanctum was dark, the light could not be from there.

But where had it come from? Did his *atma-jyoti* shine forth from his Heart? Or did Arunachaleswara come to invite him just as he invited Jnana Sambandar? Did Easwara whom Venkataraman always meditated upon, grant him knowledge of the Self? (Did not Chokkanatha appear in the form of the *maulvi* and promise to accompany Venkataraman till Tirukkoilur – after all, Arayaninallur was a part of Tirukkoilur. Possibly, there his jurisdiction ended and that of Arunachaleswara commenced thereafter – possibly also he came in this form and assumed the responsibility of protecting Venkataraman thenceforth)

Venkataraman returned from the dark sanctum to his former place in the corridor and resumed his meditation. The temple priest completed his *pooja* and called out, "Who is there – it is time to close the doors of

the temple. Get up and go." Venkataraman came out of his meditation and pleaded for a little *prasad*. The priest said brusquely, "There is no food ready for you here." "Alright, at least let me rest here this night," asked Venkataraman. The staff of the temple intervened and said, "Kilur is about a mile from here. You have a Virateswarar temple there. Maybe you can get some *prasad* there. Come along." Venkataraman accompanied them. At the temple, he fell into meditation as long as the *pooja* was going on. After the *pooja* the priest who was distributing *prasad* flatly refused to offer him any. One of the temple musicians took pity on the boy who was tired and suggested to the priest that his share of *prasad* might be given to the lad.

Someone took Venkataraman to a nearby house for water. By the time Venkataraman reached that house he fainted – nobody knew whether it was due to weakness or sleep or meditation. He revived a little later and noticed that he was at a different spot. All the food was scattered on the ground, and a crowd gathered round him, watching him. Venkataraman picked up the food, drank some water and slept on that street.

The following day was Gokula-Ashtami August 31st 1896. He was hungry and still had to go twenty miles.

As Venkataraman was walking down the street he saw the door of one house ajar but nobody was to be seen inside. He went in and asked the owner, Muthukrishna Bhagavatar who was taking his bath, in the back yard for food. The Bhagavatar had a widowed sister who looked

after the house, but at that moment she had gone to the nearby river to fetch water. There were no other female members in the house. The Bhagavatar asked him to wait till she returned.

In due course, she came and seeing the boy asking for food looked upon him as Krishna himself come in the form of a Brahmin youth seeking food! She saw the hungry look on his face and though she commenced cooking she felt the lad would not be able to withstand the delay. She said to him, "Come along, I shall serve you some left overs for the present." Venkataraman had barely two morsels when his hunger vanished. But the lady would not leave him till he ate all that was served.

Venkataraman had no energy left to walk any further. Nor did he have any money to purchase a train ticket. What if he sold the ruby earrings? But he had no experience in such deals. Finally he thought it best to raise a loan and approached the Bhagavatar. He answered all the Bhagavatar's questions and added for good measure, that he had lost his luggage in the train. He gave his real address also – in the confidence that at that distant place there was no chance of the news reaching any of his relatives. The Bhagavatar examined the earrings and was satisfied with their quality. He estimated that the earrings would cost twenty rupees at least whereas the lad was asking for only four rupees. He saw no reason to suspect anything wrong and gave Venkataraman the money he wanted.

By then, the food was ready. The lady of the house invited both of them and served them a sumptuous meal

– it being a festival day her joy knew no bounds as she thought that her guest was none other than Krishna himself. She also prepared several sweets to offer to Krishna that evening. She gave a packet of them to her guest even before offering the sweets to Krishna. How blessed she was!

Venkataraman promised the Bhagavatar to take back his earrings as soon as possible. He collected the packet of sweets and set out for the station. At a little distance away from the house he tore to pieces the slip of paper containing the Bhagavatar's address – was he to get involved in worldly affairs any more? He reached the station and slept there that night. The train was to arrive early in the morning. Venkataraman purchased a ticket for Tiruvannamalai.

We have spoken several times about Venkataraman's hunger. It is true, he experienced hunger, his body felt weak and on several occasions would faint. But when he attempted to eat, even a little food would suffice. No reason could be given for this.

11. The Goal

"Helpless have I wandered day by day. I now seek refuge in you, come to my rescue"

– Tyagaraja

THEY were the early hours of the day, darkness was slowly fading away, right from the moment he boarded the train. Venkataraman was eager to see Arunachala. As his cherished goal was nearing, his excitement mounted.

At first hazily, a little later more clearly and finally explosively the peak of Arunagiri, its middle, its foothills and its base, with the temple towers touching the stars all these came into view. Venkataraman's heart was immersed in an ocean of joy, his body quivered, his eyes brimmed with tears which came in the way of his beholding his beloved Arunachala to his heart's content.

Soon after the train reached the station, Venkataraman walked swiftly to the temple, almost running. In those early hours except the wind god, nobody was paying obeisance to the Lord. Even the rustle of that wind faded away from Venkataraman's earshot. It was the hour when the temple remained closed. Till eight nobody would come to the temple nor open the doors. But unusually, that day all the doors were wide open.

Was it a moment when the Father gave a secret *upadesa* to his son? Or did He feel that the inspired son deserved nothing less than a private audience? Or did He instruct the son: "You search for me in the depths of your heart, you shall find!"

Venkataraman walked straight into the sanctum sanctorum. Having done so, he reported to the Lord, "Father, I have come according to your bidding, I offer myself to you."

The emotional upsurge which flooded his heart vanished. The conflict of emotions abated. Peace reigned. That experience transcended both joy and sorrow – it would be appropriate to describe it as pleasurable. Tears flowed down his cheeks. The burning sensation had gone. There was no agony of any kind. An overwhelming happiness drowned him.

The son who till then was playing different parts in this world was no longer going to leave the Father's presence. All connection between him and the world snapped. Let the Lord give his benediction to the world. For Venkataraman, Arunachaleswara was the sole refuge. Never would he leave His lap. "He obtained That, having obtained which, there was nothing else to desire."

Farewell to the turmoil of this world, welcome to absolute peace. Henceforth whatever he did (physically, mentally or by any other means) was to be offered to the Father.

To whom did he offer himself? To his Father, Easwara. Who was Easwara? Was it the stone *linga* in front of him? Or Arunachala, the hill beyond? Neither.

He was different from the body. He was the spirit. The body was its sheath. The hill and the *linga* were the sheaths enveloping his Father. Else, how could the Immeasurable and Omnipresent One be limited to these tiny things? They were mere symbols of the limitless Substratum of this Universe, the source of all the power and acts in the Universe, the all pervasive Truth.

Venkataraman was established in It. What was the nature of his Father? What was the relation between his own ego and this universal, all-supporting, all-destroying, authoritative secret nature? How was he to ascertain this?

Everyone should find out the Truth for himself. This is what Varuna enjoined on Bhrigu too. He said "Learn by *tapas*."

12. Initiation

DID a *jnani* need *tapas*? Venkataraman had already realized the supreme Self. There was no need for any further effort. But for convenience we shall use the expressions "*tapas*" and "initiation." Readers must not get misled.

On the very day Venkataraman left his family and offered himself to Arunachaleswara all connection with his earlier life was torn asunder. Yet a few symbols remained. Why retain even them? He had only to be in the bliss of Self knowledge as nothing else was needed. He would tolerate nothing that came in its way. This was the only *tapas* the only initation (*diksha*). His earlier life ended. Only abidance in the Self remained.

The sastras say that for initiation a *guru* is necessary. For Venkataraman the *guru* was Arunachaleswara Himself. Ordinarily the *guru* initiates by touching various parts of the disciple's body and teaches him a *mantra*. His Father initiated him by just a look and like Dakshinamurti gave him a message through silence.

Venkataraman began discarding the symbols of his earlier life. Some he rid himself of by his own will, others left him on their own. With that, his outward life and inner life became synchronized.

Venkataraman tore and threw away the piece of paper on which Muthukrishna Bhagavatar gave his address at Kilur itself but the packet of sweets and a little money were still with him.

After offering himself at his Father's feet in the Arunachaleswara temple, Venkataraman came out into the vast temple of the world. He walked about aimlessly and reached the Ayyankulam Tank to the east of Arunachala. He noted that he still had the packet of sweets, "Does this need the sweets too?" he thought and flung it into the tank. Right from his younger days, Venkataraman had thick black hair. It was a natural embellishment. Did the body need any decoration at all? And why take the trouble of taking care of it? As he was returning from the tank, somebody asked him whether he would be interested in having his head shaved. Venkataraman assented and that stranger took him to the house of barber who usually worked at the temple. The stranger disappeared. Why did he ask Venkataraman whether he wanted his hair removed? The barber told Venkataraman that normally he would charge a higher amount for those wanting a tonsure at the temple but that he would give a concession to Venkataraman. He completed the tonsure in no time.

Venkataraman walked around and reached a garden to the east of the tank. There he tore away his clothes except for a codpiece and threw the rest into the tank. Wearing a codpiece is symbolic of chastity in word, thought and deed. The Father had vanquished Desire (*kama*). Could the son be any different? Venkataraman threw away the little money still left with him.

The *yagnopaveetam* (sacred thread) is indicative of a Brahmin birth and culture – this indicated that Venkataraman was a Brahmin, son of Sundaram Iyer. Henceforth he was the son of the Universal Father, Arunachaleswara. He was beyond all caste distinctions. The sacred thread could also cause a sense of superiority. Hence, he got rid of it.

After his tonsure he did not want the luxury of a bath, but would the *guru* Arunachaleswara allow any violation of convention? Venkataraman took to *sannyasa* in the midst of water. As he was returning to the temple, there was a heavy downpour drenching him. The heavens themselves provided the bath.

Venkataraman did not visit the temple sanctum during the next three years. There was no need for it. After all, the Father was present in the cave of his heart.

Venkataraman avoided speaking to anyone as he did not wish to have anything to do with people. Speaking itself became impossible. When he was always immersed in the Self and never even looked at the outside world how could he speak? This silence went beyond mere voice and touched the Self. Two years later, even when the Swami wanted to speak he could not as the words did not emerge clearly. It was only much later that normalcy was restored. Quite unintentionally silence itself became his characteristic. The Swami once said that silence should be the *sadhaka's* aim and that it would become the *siddha's* characteristic. But in his case, silence became his characteristic even without his passing through the

sadhaka's phase. This is how he had initiation. What about life in the world? As long as the body was there it needed nourishment. After all, the body is the instrument of all *sadhana*. But Venkataraman paid no heed to that thought – for him whatever happened to the body was the responsibility of the Father. The one who provided sustenance to the birds, fish and the other animals would surely not neglect him!

The Swami chose the temple for his dwelling.

For a *sannyasi*, the caves of a hill, the banks of a tank, a temple, the trees of a forest – are all suitable say the sastras.

13. Place of *Tapas*

THE temple of Arunachaleswara is 1480 feet long and 680 feet broad – the compound wall is said to have been built by a Vellala king (also known as Bhallala king or Bhalla king). The eastern tower is 216 feet tall and has eleven storeys. One could go and sit there. This tower is said to have been constructed by Praudda Deva Rayar.

As we enter from the east in the first perimeter we see a hall, in the southeast a flower garden and to the north a thousand pillared hall. To the southwest is an underground cellar where there is a *linga* of Easwara. But at the time of our story no *poojas* were performed here and the place was utterly dark, damp and unkempt. But as it had been the place of *tapas* for Ramana, in 1949 a devotee, Taleyarkhan, got the place cleaned, repaired and electrified. Here, a picture of Sri Bhagavan is placed and *poojas* offered regularly.

To the west of the thousand pillared hall is the hall of vehicles and behind it is a flower garden which for some inexplicable reason is called 'Vazhaithotam' (plantain garden).

On the southern side of the first compound is a large tank said to have been constructed by Sri Krishnadeva Raya. To its north are two shrines – known as "Kambathilayanar shrine" on the east and "Sivagangai Pillayar shrine" on the west. "Ilayanar" means the younger

one – a name of Subrahmanya Swami. “Pillayar” means Vighneswara.

There is a legend about “Kambathilayanar.” Praudda Deva Raya was the emperor of the Vijayanagara empire around 1450 AD. He was an admirer of the poet Arunagirinathar of Arunachala. This was unbearable to the poet Sambanda Andan. Not being able to bear the adulation showered on Arunagirinathar he challenged the king that if the poet was really all that great he should be able to present before the king, his favourite deity Subrahmanya. The king, desirous of having a glimpse of the Deity, pleaded with the poet accordingly. The poet told him: “These eyes, used as they are to seeing the physical world would not be able to stand a vision of the Lord. Anyway, I shall find out from Him and let you know.”

He prayed to Subrahmanya who told him, “If the king beholds me he will become blind. Let him think over this and decide.” The poet conveyed that to the king. “Let me become blind. I must see the Lord,” he insisted. Arunagirinathar invited the Lord who appeared in the pillar. The king had His *darshan*. As the Lord became visible in a pillar (*kambam*) he is known as “Kambathilayanar”.

To the west of the Sivaganga, along the pathway for circumambulation, there are huge trees (*ippa* trees). At the base of one of the trees a platform was put up.

As we enter the second compound, we first notice the tower. This was constructed by Ballala. To the north of the tower is the Subrahmanya shrine. He is known as “Gopura Subrahmanya Swami.” There is a legend about Gopura

Subrahmanya. Muthu, a *devadasi*, lived at Arunachala with her daughter and son. The boy was Arunagirinathar. While he was quite young the mother passed away leaving him in his sister's care. She asked her daughter to fulfil every wish of the boy. As a young man, Arunagirinathar became a libertine not heeding his sister's advice.

He frittered away not only the money left behind for him by his mother but even that of his sister. Yet he did not give up and still demanded money. The sister replied, "I no longer have any money but mother has asked me to fulfil all your wishes. Your only wish is to enjoy women. I am prepared to fulfil that wish of yours. What if our mother is one and the same, our fathers were different persons. Hence there is nothing wrong," saying this, she touched him. With this Arunagirinathar realized the enormity of his degradation and in a fit of penitence climbed up the Ballala tower and jumped down to end his life. Lord Subrahmanya held him midway in his arms, gave him a rosary and initiated him into a *mantra*. This is the legend. With this we may end the story of Arunachaleswara temple. For those desiring to meditate in solitude and wanting to be inward-minded and absorbed in the Self there are any number of solitary spots – the temple towers, the flower gardens, and the thousand pillared hall. These were frequently used but nobody visited the southern side of "Sivaganga" during night.

14. The Kingdom of *Yoga*

VENKATARAMAN now came to be known as *Brahmana Paradesi*. In the Tamil region, Saivite non-Brahmins used to take to *sannyasa* and go about Arunachala in hundreds whereas such wandering *Brahmin sannyasins* were few. They came to be known as *Brahmana Paradesis*.

The new Paradesi took his place at a platform in the thousand pillared hall for his meditation. Winter was just approaching, the monsoon had not abated. He had no clothes either to spread on the floor or to cover himself with. He never sought people's company and even if any such company came his way he moved away. He sat silently, with his eyes shut. Even while walking about he never spoke to anyone. He never sought food from anyone and if anyone offered him food while he was wide awake, he would accept it. He abided in the Self, he held his senses captive and controlled his mind. He was enjoying the Kingdom of *Yoga*. This lad never sought anything. However, even if he left others alone, they would not leave him alone. For them he was an object of curiosity, or ridicule or blame but for a few, he was an object of respect. He was at a new place, helpless, unprotected –

but was he unprotected really? His only refuge were the feet of Siva but that Siva never appeared before him!

This lad became the target of the local urchins who looked upon him as a madcap. Did not 'Mad Seshadri' arrive at that town four years earlier? Just as they showered pebbles, or pieces of pots on Seshadri they did the same to this lad also. But they threw their missiles from a distance lest the 'mad-man' retaliate. As a result, the missiles missed their target. But they disturbed his meditation. To avoid all this he moved to the Pathala *lingam* – the cellar. The urchins were afraid of entering that place. The insects and other fauna who had the place all for themselves had now a competitor in their midst. While the lad sat in *padmasana* and was enjoying the bliss of *atma*, the vermin enjoyed his flesh and blood. In his meditative mood the Swami was not at all conscious of what was happening. Among those who visited the place during the *deepam* festival some admired the boy's severe austerities. One among them was Ratnammal, wife of Velayudha Chetty. She fetched him food occasionally and, moved by his condition, begged him to stay at her house. But the Swami's attention was elsewhere. He scarcely heard what she said. Where was the question of his acceptance? She was disappointed. Yet she left a piece of cloth for his use – either to cover himself or to use on the floor. The Swami in meditation remained that way, so also the cloth stayed where it was kept.

How did Ramana, in his deep *tapas*, get his food? On the day he reached Arunachala, Ramana had no food at all. On the following day, when he was in the thousand

pillared hall Maunaswami of the Gopura Subrahmanya shrine, a Malayalee, visited the hall and observing the boy utterly exhausted, asked one of his followers to fetch him some food. Some food – that too obtained as alms – was brought. It consisted of coarse rice, a little salt, and pickle. It was served to the lad. Thereafter his requirements of food were taken care of by Maunaswami.

The nuisance of the urchins did not stop – they continued throwing all sorts of things into the cellar. The Paradesi had no fear of being hurt – he was beyond these.

Once some Muslim boys also joined the urchins and tried to enter the cellar but fear held them back. So all that they could do was to throw things. At that very moment one Venkatachala Mudaliar passed that way. He knew that the Swami was in the Pathala *linga*. He immediately got hold of a tree branch and rushed towards the urchins. Seeing him thus armed they took to their heels. Out of the Pathala *linga* emerged a dust-laden Seshadri Swami. An anxious Mudaliar asked Seshadri Swami if he was hurt. Seshadri Swami said that Chinna Swami who needed attention was inside the cellar and went his way. Mudaliar went down and in the darkness could see nothing at first but later the outlines of the Swami – covered with dust and seated in the *padmasana* became visible faintly at first and a little better later.

Mudaliar at once went to the Vazhaithotam where Palaniswami was staying with his disciples. He took four or five of them for help and went back to the cellar. They lifted the Swami and brought him out and seated him. It was only then that the Swami regained his senses.

"It is blasphemous to disturb the *tapas* of such a one," they thought and left the place.

Thereafter the Paradesi became *Brahmana Swami*.

As long as *Brahmana Swami* stayed at the Gopura Subrahmanya shrine, Maunaswami who lived there looked after him. Right from day one he took care to ensure that the "silent Brahmin young boy" had food. He shared his food with him especially fruits and milk collected after *abhishekam* to Uma Devi. The milk was mixed up with water, turmeric, sugar, pieces of fruit and camphor. *Brahmana Swami* had no preferences and gulped down whatever was offered. One of the senior priests noticed this and was sorry that this concoction was being offered to him and henceforth arranged that milk alone was given to the Swami after the *abhishekam* without other items being added. If on any day there was delay someone would run to the Brahmana street and arrange for food being offered to the Swami – this was known as *bhiksha*. Thus two months passed by.

Nandanavanam:

Vazhai garden was to the west of the thousand pillared hall. As noted earlier it was a flower garden but not a plantain garden as suggested by the name. There were well-grown creepers of pink flowers known as *Kasturi patte*. Brahmana Swami moved over there from the shrine. He commenced his meditation under one bower and by the time he completed it he found himself under another. With the passage of time his codpiece tore and towards the end of 1896 he was unclothed for some time to which the temple authorities took exception.

Vahana mantapam (Vehicle Hall):

This was the next place chosen by the Swami for his *tapas*. Here also during meditation the Swami's body would move and find a place in between the wheels of two chariots. He would spend most of the time near the wall in semi-darkness.

Later he spent some time near the Sivaganga tank, first under the *bilva* tree and later under the *ippa tree*. Winter had set in by then. It was 1897, January-February. He had nothing to cover himself with. It was quite chill. The only place where he could stay was the base of a tree with the sky above and the dusty ground below, wet with dew. It is said that *rishis* of yore did their *tapas* in the middle of water – this *tapas* of the Swami was no less severe!

At a village called Tirumani near Vandavasi lived a Saivite renunciate named Uddandi Nayanar. Being averse to living with his family he lived apart in a *math*. Later he studied numerous Tamil philosophic texts but could experience neither peace nor the Self. He visited Arunachala in December 1896 and during his circumambulation noticed the young *tapasvi* in deep *tapas*, lost to the world. Nayanar was deeply impressed and thought: "This is *tapas*. This is abidance. If such a one does not experience the Self who else will? By serving him I may also experience the Self." He firmly believed in this. Nayanar also decided to stay under another nearby tree in that chill weather and devote himself to the service of the young *tapasvi*: Much later the Swami himself described Nayanar as a person of detachment.

Except when Nayanar had to go out to cook his food, at all other times he stood guard over the Swami and prevented curious crowds from collecting there. It was no easy task – the urchins harassed the Swami whenever Nayanar went out for food. Once, when no one was around and the Swami was unaware of his body, a particularly vicious urchin passed urine on the back of the Swami and ran away complimenting himself on his 'cleverness'. After regaining consciousness the Swami understood what had happened. What could Nayanar do in such circumstances? The Swami was a personification of tolerance but Nayanar could not bear it and felt deeply hurt.

Nayanar had another grievance. He did not wish to speak to the Swami unless the latter spoke to him first. On the other hand, the Swami never even opened his eyes. Nayanar used to sit at a distance studying such philosophic texts as *Jnana Vasishtam*, *Kaivalya Navaneetam* and looked forward to his Swami's grace.

Nayanar was the first attendant of the Swami.

15. *Yoga Siddhi*

THE Saiva *sadhus* of the South had a number of *maths* referred to as *adheenams*. Among them "Tiruvannamalai *adheenam*" founded by Daivasikamani Desikar was one of the most important. It had several branches all over the land and the one at Kunnakudi was the most prosperous. Perhaps for this reason one of the successor heads, made it his headquarters. The *samadhi* of Deivasikamani was built at Kilnathur, a suburb of Tiruvannamalai. A temple also was constructed over the Samadhi. This came to be known as Gurumurtam. At the time of this story, *pooja* and other services at Gurumurtam were being performed by Annamalai Tambiran. Tambiran also once stayed at Kunnakudi but left the place and moved over to Tiruvannamalai for personal reasons. Tambiran spent his time singing *thevarams* (the Saivite hymns composed by Appar, Sundaramurti and Jnana Sambandar), performing *pooja* at the *Samadhi*, going out and collecting alms of which he distributed some to the poor. He led a very principled and austere life.

Tambiran happened to see the Swami in *tapas* under the *iluppai* tree. He was astonished and made it a point to have his *darshan* as frequently as possible. He thought that it would be nice to take the Swami to Gurumurtam – it would benefit him personally and be convenient to the

Swami too. So he broached the matter with Nayanar. Both of them pleaded with the Swami saying, "Gurumurtam will be convenient for Swami, there will be no nuisance from the crowds. Yet it is close to Arunachala. Swami must consent to come there." Swami consented. In February 1897, he moved to Gurumurtam and since then he came to be known as the "Swami of Gurumurtam."

Gurumurtam: The *tapas* continued uninterrupted at this place. The austerity became more severe, indifference towards physical comfort increased. The Swami never bathed or cleaned himself, his locks became matted, his nails grew long and curved, his hands fell into disuse.

Gurumurtam was full of ants but the Swami cared nothing about it. He was in their midst unmindful of the havoc wrought by them. He was immersed in the Self. To protect the Swami from ants someone provided a stool with the legs immersed in water. But as the Swami was leaning against a wall, the ants continued to infest the place. The area which touched the Swami's back got darkened – this patch could be seen for a very long time even after the Swami left Gurumurtam.

How could one observing such severe austerity fail to evoke respect? Looking at his long nails people concluded that he was very old, they also believed that he could perform miracles. People in large numbers began thronging the place hoping that their desires for health, wealth, progeny would be fulfilled by him. They came with various offerings. Starting with mere *darshan* soon people began composing various hymns in his praise! Those

attending on the Swami erected temporary barricades to prevent people from coming near him. But the people would not agree to leave without the Swami partaking of the eatables brought by them as offerings. Everyone wanted the *punya* of offering something or the other to the Swami – this led to quarrels among them also. There had been a time when no food was available at all but now there was a surfeit of it. To solve this, it was decided that only one devotee could offer food on any given day – there were only seven days in a week but those who wanted to serve ran into hundreds. Even this did not work out well. Above all, what the Swami took was very little, even that only once a day. All the offerings would be mixed up and as quite a lot of milk formed the major part of the offerings the mixture became fluid. The Swami would open his eyes only once around midday, when a tumblerful of this liquid would be offered to him. That was all that the Swami took before resuming his meditation.

Regulated diet is always advisable. But for the Swami it could not be enforced then or even later. Frustrated at this state of affairs, the Swami once said much later, "the deity in the temple is lucky. People offer him some food by merely showing it to him and take it back with themselves. But here the Swami must accept whatever is offered even if unwell. If I don't touch it, nobody else will."

There was no light at Gurumurtam, Swami himself was the light. After a few months a Chettiar arranged lighting.

Tambiran's devotion and faith increased as the months passed by. Once, he took to worshipping the Swami himself

after completing the usual *pooja* at the *math*. He went through the usual process, which the Swami could not tolerate. Tambiran thought that by his example, the visitors' devotion to the Swami would increase. The following day, before Tambiran returned from the town the Swami wrote on the wall in Tamil with a charcoal piece, "This is enough for this" and showed it to Tambiran at meal time. The latter could not understand it. The next day, the Swami added, "Filling the stomach" and showed it to Tambiran. Even then Tambiran did not stop. Only when the Swami went out at *pooja* time Tambiran realized that the Swami would not accept this service and gave it up.

The people did not know who exactly the Swami was – they merely referred to him as "Brahmana Swami" or "Gurumurtam Swami". After seeing that the Swami wrote on the wall for Tambiran they concluded that the Swami was a Tamilian, well-versed in Tamil. A little after this, the original name of the Swami got revealed in the following manner.

Venkatarama Iyer was an official in the local taluka office. He was free till about eleven o' clock in the morning and made it a point to visit Gurumurtam every day and spend a couple of hours there. He was determined to find out the Swami's original name and asked Tambiran who confessed his ignorance; finally he told the Swami, "I won't leave this place without knowing Swami's real name – whatever be the consequences – even if I lose my job or starve." Saying this, he gave a piece of paper and a pencil

to the Swami. As he was a good person, the Swami wrote in English "Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi". Venkatarama Iyer could not make out "zhi" in the spelling. The Swami had a copy of *Periapuranam* which had hymns by Sundaramurthi on Sri Bhoominateswara. As the Swami had studied it at Madurai, he picked up that portion of the book and showed it to Venkatarama Iyer and thereby cleared his doubt. At that moment Tambiran was present and thus he got to know the Swami's original name.

After about two months, Tambiran asked Nayanar to look after the Swami as he had to leave the town for about a week. But he never returned for nearly a year. Meanwhile, a few weeks after Tambiran left, Nayanar was summoned by the management of his *math*. Hence he also had to leave Arunachala. The Swami was left without any attendant.

This particular deficiency soon got covered. There was a devotee, Nagalingaswami at Arunachala. After his demise, one Palani Swami, a Malayalee stayed in his house. He would serve at the Vinayaka temple near the Ayyankulam street and then would partake of the offerings once a day even without adding any salt. Watching his devotion and service-mindedness Srinivasa Iyer, a village official of Eraiyur, said to him, "Why do you waste your life serving this deity of stone? At Gurumurtam there is a living god. Watching his *tapas* we are reminded of great devotees like Dhruva of whom we read in the *puranas*. You serve him and lead a blissful life. Presently there is none to look after him." Encouraged by these adulatory

references to the Swami, Palaniswami went to Gurumurtam. By then, the Swami had been at that place for about five months. How could anyone fail to develop devotion to the Swami watching his state? Palaniswami thought, “This Swami is my refuge. Devotion to him will surely help me immensely,” and began serving the Swami. To start with, he worshipped the stone Vinayaka also, but as his devotion towards the Swami increased, he thought, “It is because of my *pooja* of Vinayaka, that I have obtained this *guru*. Why continue with that *pooja* anymore?” From that day, he never left the Swami who was his all – father, mother, *guru* and God!

With the arrival of Palaniswami, the nuisance of the crowds lessened for the Swami. During his absence, Palani would lock the door from outside, leaving the Swami within. This arrangement helped the Swami a lot in his meditation. He lost all awareness of day and night, day of the week, east and west! Because of such severe austerity he became utterly weak and incapable of getting up and walking even a few steps. In such a state, he fainted once as he neared the door. He was not even aware that Palaniswami caught hold of him and prevented him from hurting himself. As his intake of food was almost nothing the normal body functions got badly disturbed.

An interesting incident occurred once, which demonstrates the utter detachment of the Swami. In the garden close to Gurumurtam there were tamarind trees. Some old thieves, no longer capable of undertaking arduous jobs, thought of stealing tamarind from the trees.

There was no one around except the Swami who was alone without his attendant. The thieves saw him and apprehended that he might watch them and inform others. One of the thieves said to the other, "This man sits motionless with his eyes closed and does not utter a single word. Let us pour some cactus juice in his eyes and see if he reacts." Yet the Swami did not move or say anything. He seemed to be completely unconcerned about what happened either to his body or to the tamarind trees. The thieves were astonished at this extraordinary self control of the Swami and told themselves "Let us leave him alone and get on with our job."

The Swami stayed at Gurumurtam for a year and a half. People always used to go there and disturb the Swami's *tapas*. Close to Gurumurtam was a mango grove whose owner, Venkataramana Naicker invited the Swami to stay in his garden so that he could be in peace. He also assured the Swami that nobody would be allowed to visit him without his permission.

At this request, the Swami, and with him Palaniswami also, moved over in April-May of 1898. Two platforms were erected for them amidst the mango trees and there both of them lived, like watchmen.

16. Victorious *Yoga*

"IT is nearing dusk. He is not at the playground. It seems that he did not go to the school. Nor has he returned home. Where has Venkataraman gone without informing anyone? Maybe he left for Manamadurai at being scolded for neglecting his studies. There was nothing special about the scolding beyond what was being said usually," so thought Subbu Iyer and Nagaswami and made enquiries of friends and acquaintances. They did not know what to do. At last they noticed the letter left behind by Venkataraman in Nagaswami's trunk. It was confirmed that he left for an undisclosed destination – how to search for him? They felt that they should at least inform people at Manamadurai, which they did the same day (29-8-1896) by telegram. The news came as a shock to Alagamma and her brother-in-law Nelliappa Iyer. This was a major shock for Alagamma within five years of her husband's passing away.

Several thoughts crossed their minds – could Nagaswami have scolded Venkataraman for neglecting his studies, even if it were so what was wrong with it? Could Subbu Iyer's wife have harassed him with a lot of household chores? But she was not that type at all. Did the school teacher warn him that he might not get through his examinations. Comments flew past on these lines. But was this all true? When the call of the Supreme comes,

it becomes irresistible and no worldly attachment can even come in the way. Venkataraman had no such attachment, all that he was interested in was lying in the lap of his Father. How could such a one stay at home?

The people from Manamadurai went to Madurai to join the search but to no avail. "After all, he has taken three rupees, as soon as that money is spent he is bound to come home," so they tried to console Alagamma. Days, weeks, months passed by but the boy did not return. The days of consolation also ended.

A rumour reached them that Venkataraman had joined a drama troupe at Tiruvananthapuram. Nelliappa Iyer went there to make enquiries, but it was a futile exercise. Not satisfied with his efforts, Alagamma herself went there. At a street corner she saw someone of the same physique as Venkataraman – but could not catch up with him. Unsuccessful, Alagamma returned home.

In due course, Nagaswami passed his examination and joined the Registrar's office as a clerk. His wife also joined him. And seeing her son settle down, Alagamma was to an extent satisfied and her sorrow receded into the background.

On 1 May 1898 Subbu Iyer passed away at Madurai. Nelliappa Iyer and others went to Madurai and after the funeral ceremonies Nelliappa Iyer stayed back for a short time. One afternoon, a Tiruchuzhi youth ran into the house excitedly announcing, "Venkataraman's whereabouts are now known. He is at Tiruvannamalai and he is a famous *sadhu* there." In utter disbelief, the family asked him, how he came to know about that. He replied: "I had been to the

Tirugnanasambandar *math* here. One Annamalai Tambiran of a *math* at Tiruvannamalai was describing with great devotion, a youthful sannyasi at Tiruvannamalai. He knew me because of some properties belonging to their *math* in the vicinity of our place. He recognised me and said, 'The young *sannyasi* belongs to your place' I, in return asked him who the sannyasi was. He said, 'Tiruchuzhi Venkataraman – that is what he wrote on a piece of paper.' As soon as I heard it, I ran up to this place."

On hearing this, Nelliappa Iyer, along with Narayanaswami Iyer, a distant relative, went to Tiruvannamalai. That was the period when the Swami was staying in the mango-grove of Venkataramana Naicker, and he refused to grant permission to them to visit the Swami saying, "He is a *mouni*, you should not go and disturb him on any account." Nelliappa Iyer pleaded, "At least, let us have a glimpse of him," Naicker did not relent. Finally, Nelliappa Iyer begged, "I will give a note. Please show it to your Swami and allow us to go in, only if he agrees." Naicker yielded. Nelliappa Iyer wrote: "Manamadurai pleader, Nelliappa Iyer seeks an audience." The paper had the handwriting of Nagaswami on the reverse, the paper belonged to the Registrar's office. The Swami saw the note and concluded that Nagaswami was employed. He consented to see them. Nelliappa Iyer entered the grove.

It was true. He was their boy. The dust covered-body appeared repulsive. Several emotions flooded Nelliappa Iyer, he was glad at finding their boy, sad at his unkempt

appearance, happy at his being so eminent, moved at his being in such a pitiable state. As the Swami was a *mouni*, Nelliappa Iyer told Naicker and Palaniswami–

I am happy that a boy of our family has reached such an exalted state. But he need not expose himself to the elements in this manner – there is a huge support for him back home, he need not suffer like this. He need not forsake his path or become a householder. He can continue to be a *sadhu* amidst his relatives, I shall arrange all facilities for that. There is the *samadhi* of a *mahatma* at Manamudarai. If the Swami does not wish to stay at home he may reside there. I will take care of him and ensure that he is not at all disturbed.

All arguments were fruitless. The Swami sat motionless like a rock to such an extent that Nelliappa Iyer began to doubt whether he heard them or whether he was their boy at all! Yet the trials continued for about five or six days.

"The boy has completely changed – he does not like our words," thought Nelliappa Iyer. Narayanaswami Iyer became angry and wanted to forcibly take away the boy. As he approached the Swami with this intention he felt a burning sensation all over his body. Then he backed out and thought enough was enough. They then decided to return home and inform Alagamma of what had happened. They gave her the comforting news that it was indeed their boy whom they met and the disconcerting news that he refused to return home.

Alagamma was not satisfied and said to Nagaswami, "Would he have returned empty-handed if the boy had been his? Would he not have forcibly brought him? Let us

go ourselves." But Nagaswami pleaded that it would not be possible for him to obtain leave from the office.

After staying at the grove for six months, the Swami felt it advisable to shift, as with frequent visitors the garden might get spoilt. Thus he moved to Arunagirinathar temple.

Arunagirinathar is reputed to be the *linga* consecrated by Adi Sankara. This temple is to the west of Ayyankulam tank. The Swami moved there sometime in August-September, 1898.

During his stay at the Gopura Subrahmanyalaya, which was before his moving to Gurumurtam, the Swami had to beg for food only once. That was when he declined the food offered by a pious lady who usually offered food to *sadhus*. He went to a house near the temple and clapped his hands. The lady of the house, Muthamma, recognised him, took him inside and served him good food. She felt that the Swami resembled her son who had just passed away. During his stay at Gurumurtam, the Swami did not have to go out to beg. Several people would bring food and offer it to him. While at the mango grove nobody was allowed to enter it and offer food. Palaniswami would beg for food either at Kilnathur or Arunachala and bring it. Possibly, the Swami now felt like begging for food himself again and wanting to be all alone asked Palaniswami to go his way. But Palaniswami returned to the Swami the same evening. Where could he go? How could he live apart from the Swami?

Within one month, the Swami moved again as the crowds were too much to bear. He went to the Arunachala temple and stayed in the Western tower. But the crowd did not leave him alone either.

To the northwest of Arunachala there is a hillock, Pavalakundru. It is a part of Arunachala and some say it is the foot of Arunachala. There is a temple of Siva, a water spring and a cave on the hill. Gautama, the *rishi*, did penance here say some. At the foot of the hill is a monastery.

The Swami lived in the temple or the cave. Whether Palaniswami was there or not, for the fun of it, he would go out into the town to beg. As he was the silent one he would simply halt at a house and clap. On the appearance of someone at the door he would show his cupped hands, receive whatever was dropped in it and pass by the street eating the food. He was not concerned at whoever watched him. Those who visited the Swami at his place would be surprised at this behaviour. Swami described the act of begging thus: "As the begging was voluntary there was no feeling of humiliation, one did not care even for the status of an emperor. It was all enjoyable."

During the Christmas vacation of 1898 Alagamma reached Arunachala, along with her son, Nagaswami. Learning that the Swami was at Pavalakundru the mother and son went there. The Swami was lying on a rock and facing the east. Notwithstanding the matted locks, elongated nails, dust-laden face or the loin cloth the mother immediately recognised her son. She broke down, coaxed and begged her son to return home. The Swami neither spoke nor moved. She entreated him in many ways, recounted to him her tribulations, and pleaded with him but the Swami did not utter a single word or yield. The following day, she visited him at which time he was

surrounded by some people. She narrated her sorry story to them. They were moved and one among them, Pachaiappa Pillai, intervened and asked the Swami to have some consideration for the mother and at least give a reply to satisfy her. He gave him a piece of paper and pencil and asked him to write out the reply at least, instead of being silent. The Swami accepted the argument and wrote thus:

> The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds – their *prarabdhakarma*. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen – try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is for one to be silent.
>
> – From *Self Realization* by B.V. Narasimha Swami

This was the first *upadesa* of the Swami. But at that time, the mother would have been disturbed at this *upadesa*. They had no alternative but to return as Nagaswami's vacation was drawing to a close. "Was it for this that I waited? This is all I am destined for," thought Alagamma and reluctantly left Arunachala.

Some generations earlier, a renunciate had come seeking alms to the house of one of Sundaram Iyer's ancestors. He could not get any food and incensed at this indifference, cursed the family, "At least one member of your family will have to beg for food like me in each generation."

For three generations by then that curse (or was it a blessing?) had come true. For us, that is a blessing truly, otherwise how could we have a redeemer like Ramana Bhagavan?

17. Preparation

DID Venkataraman who attained Self knowledge at Madurai itself need any further initiation or penance, ask some. The saint-composer Thyagaraja also questioned, "Did one who knew that he was not the body need any *japa*?" For such a one who had no desires, any penance cannot be for any selfish reason. So, it is implied that the penance of such a one can have some other meaning.

"One with the knowledge of Brahman must be Brahman itself." Yet in this illusory world his physical body was very much visible, it was performing some functions. Hence for a liberated being there might be no *karma* but his body did not escape the efforts of *karma*.

All liberated beings may not be involved in family affairs. Some like Janaka ruled the land, yet some others like Dattatreya acted as teachers to seekers. Those appointed to be teachers needed certain credentials, they had to have practice, knowledge and oratorical skill. Without these, their position would not have the imprimatur of the cosmic force. Did not Sri Ramakrishna say, "People will accept the orders proclaimed through public announcements only if they are made by one authorized by government to do so."

For acquiring all these and to occupy the position of a teacher, time and practice are needed. One can see such

stages of preparation in the lives of every prophet. After acquisition of Self knowledge Jesus spent forty days in seclusion. Everyone is familiar with the experience of the Buddha. Mohammed became a recluse in mountain caves.

Such being the case, why doubt the need for a period of preparation to those divine beings in human form who were to become World Teachers?

The moment *Sakti* entered Venkataraman it was decreed that the body was meant for the world. Hence it had to be prepared for the prescribed duty in seclusion. Likewise, it had to sever all family ties which were opposing forces and also move to a distant place – Arunachala. For every atom of the body to be filled with *Sakti* and be ready for the benefit of humanity, time was needed. It was due to the inspiration of that *Sakti* that Swami's body abided in the *atma* and did not even look at the world or people; speech also got internalized.

Nobody, except those great ones with divine eyes, can ever know what *chakras* were pierced, what occult powers accumulated in that body during that period. Hence, no one can describe these events when they were actually going on. By the time it came to the practical world, the body was not the same. It was the body of Parameswara, every atom of it was sacred, powerful. Having said that Arunachala was the *guru* of preparation let us now turn towards mundane activities.

It was at the mango grove of Venkatarama Naicker near Gurumurtam that the Swami's activities in the form of teachings commenced.

During the period of intense preparation the Swami's power of speech receded, and when he resumed speaking it was difficult. All that the Swami could do was to utter a few words to Palaniswami, his attendant.

Uddandi Nayanar came to know that the Swami had knowledge of Tamil. Thereupon he begged him to give him some *upadesa*. By then the Swami was not familiar with any scriptural literature, whereas Uddandi Nayanar had already read a lot of it – what he looked forward to was some teaching born out of experience. As if to suit him, the Swami wrote the instructions on scraps of paper. Nayanar retained them until his last days, as precious treasures. He recited them with the reverence reserved for the *mahavakyas*.

This was how Uddandi Nayanar became the Swami's first disciple. The instructions of the Swami were lost. Possibly they were specific to that person. But this would scarcely be sufficient for a World Teacher. *Sakti* would certainly provide him an opportunity to acquire knowledge of the sastras.

Tambiran would constantly be singing *Thevarams* or *Tiruppugazh*, which were a treasure house of spiritual thoughts – by listening to him the Swami had by then become familiar with them.

Palaniswami could not read well but was interested in doing so. He took great pains in reading the Tamil spiritual texts borrowed from the Nagalingaswamy Library in the town. He could read with great difficulty but could not understand. Sympathizing with him the Swami would

go through the texts in a short time and explain them in easy language to Palaniswami. The Swami was intelligent, he had the experience of Reality and was capable of memorizing the terminology. Thus because of Palaniswami the Swami became familiar with the Tamil texts of *Kaivalya Navaneetham, Vasishtam*, *Viveka Choodamani* and the like. Palaniswami became the second disciple of the Swami.

The Swami never initiated anyone. But it was said that by his look or appearance in their dreams and touching them on the head or heart he had granted initiation to some. His *upadesa* consisted mostly in the replies he gave to the questions of seekers. Each one would come to know by his experience whether the Swami accepted him as a disciple. For them there was never any doubt. But there was never any practice of formally accepting anyone as a disciple or initiating with a *mantra* or some such thing.

By then *Sakti* had provided sufficient book-knowledge to the Swami, it remained for him to assume his role. But to become a World Teacher a seat was necessary and we shall now see how it was provided.

18. The Peerless Hill

"WHEN Ganapati said, "Mother is mine" and sat on the lap of Parvati, Kumara retorted, "Never mind, Father is mine" and got on to Siva's lap and was kissed by him on the head. Of this Kumara who pierced (with his lance) the Krauncha hill, Ramana is a glorious manifestation."

– Ramana Gita. 18.9

AROUND March 1899, the Swami left Pavalakundru and ascended Arunachala. It is entirely appropriate that the son who abides in Reality should get on to the lap of his Father in his natural state!

Legend has it that Easwara resided in Arunachala in four forms. The first was the dazzling form without a beginning or an end causing amazement to Brahma and Vishnu, the second was the *linga* form of Arunachaleswara, the third Arunagiri and the fourth Arunagiri yogi in *siddha* form.

Arunachala is of brilliant light, yet it appears in brick red colour as a stone with not much of vegetation. The hill is noted to be very ancient originating much earlier than the Himalayas.

It is said by geologists that the hill was formed during the period when the earth, then a ball of fire, was cooling

down and solidifying as stone and that it was part of the Lemuria which submerged in the Indian Ocean. For this reason it would appear that this hill is at the centre of the earth as mentioned by the *puranas.*

For those interested in performing penance, the hill offers many suitable places. Standing behind the western tower of the Arunachala Temple one notices a path to the top of the hill. While climbing along this path one may observe several caves, shrines and the like suitable for performing meditation. One occasionally comes across springs of fresh mineral water sparkling in the rays of the sun like liquid gold and making rumbling noises like musical notes. Along this path are several trees which give ample shade, the groves also are good places for *tapas*. As one ascends the hill and heads towards the east one beholds the Arunachala Temple and to its east, the town. To the east of the town lies the *Ayyankulam* tank (also known as *Indra teertham*). Surrounding the tank one notices fields and orchards, at the distant horizon are rows of hills bringing together the earth and the sky-all of which provide a picturesque setting. Therefore, those not of a particularly religious bent of mind also ascend the hill to witness the splendour of nature, obtain relief from daily cares and get peace and happiness. Those with an other-worldly attitude look at that personification of Easwara and either sing its praise or fall into meditation and obtain peace.

Sadguruswami Cave:

Near the foot of the hill lies a cave. Though in a dilapidated state, during the period under consideration

some people stayed there. A Malayali Yogi lived there at one time and in his memory, his disciples began describing the cave as Sadguru Swami cave. There is a temple a little above the cave. Actually it is also a cave but people use it as a temple. It is known as *Guha Namasivaya Temple* after Guha Namasivaya, a Veerasaiva devotee, belonging to Srisailam. Both he and Virupaksha Deva, another devotee, reached Arunachala and settled in these caves; hence the caves are named after them.

Virupaksha Cave:

This most important cave on the mountain is further up. Its shape resembles the syllable "Om" and it is said that as the wind enters the cave, the sound "Om" becomes audible. Close to the cave is a water spring. The *samadhi* of Virupaksha is there. Those following the Veerasaiva creed ran a *math* there. At about the commencement of the twentieth century a law suit was going on and neither of the contending parties bothered about the *math*. Hence anyone could stay there without any hindrance. This became the Swami's residence until he left for Skandasramam in 1915-1916.

Years after the Swami settled down at Virupaksha cave the question of ownership of the *math* was settled by the court. The head of the *math* in whose favour it was decreed appointed an agent, whose meagre income was from the donations of the visitors to the *math*. But he hit upon the idea of collecting a fee from visitors during Krittikai. Many could not pay this fee and went back. The Swami got to know this and felt that those who

wished to have his *darshan* were being unfairly taxed. He therefore left the cave and sat beneath a tamarind tree opposite the cave. But the agent began levying the fee even on the approach to the tree. The Swami came to know about this and as he had no compelling reasons to reside there, moved to Guhanamassivaya cave. The agent then realised that the visitors came to have a *darshan* of the Swami and not to see the cave or the *math*. Having done so, he begged of the Swami to reside at the Virupaksha cave which he did.

Mulaipal Teertham, Mango Tree Cave (Chuthaguha):

Opposite the Virupaksha cave towards the north, was the *Mulaipal teertham*. (milk spring) which always had copious sweet water. Legend has it that the water at Guhanamassivaya cave sprang from the big toe of Siva and that this spring arose from the breast of Ambika. Near this was a mango tree at the foot of which arose a cave. Hence it came to be known as Mango tree cave. During summer months at the Virupaksha cave, there was no breeze and no water and as the place was pretty warm, two devotees, Ramanujacharya and Rangacharya modified the Mango tree cave and made it habitable for the Swami during the summer.

Skandasramam:

Further up beyond the Virupaksha cave was a perennial spring – with clear, sweet water. The Swami's devotees felt it could serve as a residence for him. In 1915-1916 they cleaned and levelled the ground and built a house with trees all round. The coconut and

mango trees provided a picturesque setting and any beholder was pleased at its sight. It was as if it was the heart of Arunachala. The building had a kitchen and a living area with a verandah in front. The devotee who started it all was Kandaswami. The *ashram* came to be known as Skandasramam because of the disciple and the belief of several devotees that the Swami was an incarnation of Skanda.

Wherever he stayed there was no dearth of food for the Swami. The increasing numbers of devotees were always anxious to fetch and offer food to him wherever he stayed. If it became inevitable, Palaniswami, the faithful attendant, went into the town and begged for food. Palaniswami was joined by some others who were eager to serve the Swami, one among them would go into the town and collect food.

19. Commencement of Instructions

AFTER the Swami moved over to the Virupaksha cave his visitors increased. All kinds of people visited him-the seekers, the unlettered as well as the learned. Though the Swami did not teach anything, the mere fact that he was taking cognisance of what was going on around was enough to draw people who naturally assumed that such an embodiment of *tapas* was bound to have great wisdom. Those interested in spirituality and *yoga* approached the Swami with their doubts. It was natural for the merciful Swami to respond to them. Yet, in order to teach in a manner intelligible to them, it was necessary for the Swami to have an acquaintance with the accepted terminology as laid down in traditional texts. It was also necessary to explain matters in a manner that would enable the listeners to understand and practise them. For this purpose it became necessary to have a look at the Sastras, not for himself but for the sake of others. Though established in "That from which the mind and word turn back," in order to explain about That, employment of words was unavoidable. For this reason also the Swami had to consult scriptural texts.

One of those who came to serve the Swami after he reached the Virupaksha cave was Gambhiram Seshayya, municipal overseer. Right from 1900 he was a regular visitor to the Swami. He was a Rama *bhakta* who constantly chanted Rama's name. He looked upon himself as a servant of the Swami and swept the cave regularly. As he had interest in *yoga* he studied *Rajayoga* of Swami Vivekananda and other texts; he also studied the *Rama Geeta* in English but he could not master them. As his knowledge of Sanskrit was poor he had a large number of doubts-in order to get them cleared, he would bring those texts to the Swami, who read them and wrote down their substance in Tamil on small pieces of paper. Thereupon Seshayya would raise further questions for which also the Swami gave answers in writing.

Seshayya preferred the *ashtanga yoga marga* whereas the Swami advocated the path of enquiry. The former also attached great importance to *pranayama*. The Swami realised that it would not do to convert such a one suddenly to his way. So while he clarified the points of Vivekananda's *Yoga* he also stressed the importance of the ultimate goal. *Yoga* practice was for the purpose of achieving concentration, whereas the Self could be experienced only after the mind was eliminated. If the Self was experienced what further need was there for the mind?

The bundles of papers written by the Swami belonged to the years 1900, 1901 and 1902. Those bundles lay in Seshayya's house who wrote down their contents in a small note book. After his passing away, his brother Krishnayya

collected them all and gave them to Sri Natanananda who rewrote them in the question and answer format and published them as *Vichara Sangraha* (*Spiritual Instruction*) in Tamil. This was translated into Telugu by Swami Pranavananda and into English under the title *Self enquiry*. In *Vichara Sangraha* the Swami also showed how *ashtanga yoga* could be used as a help to the path of enquiry.

Similarly, a *pandit* from Chidambaram brought Sankaracharya's *Vivekachoodamani* in Sanskrit. By then a poetic Tamil translation of the book was available and brought by Palaniswami. At their insistence the Swami put it in Tamil prose for which the Sanskrit book was helpful.

Uddandi Nayanar who left the Swami while he stayed at Gurumurtham could not return for seven years, till 1904. He offered his entire savings of one hundred rupees as *gurudakshina* to the Swami who, while appreciating the devotion of the disciple, declined the offer as he would have nothing to do with money. Uddandi Nayanar was insistent and left the amount with Gambhiram Seshayya, who was then looking after the affairs of the *ashram* and requested him to use the money for any purpose approved by the Swami. For several years the money was not utilised. Once, while cleaning up the Virupaksha cave the manuscript (of *Vivekachoodamani*) was noticed. Seshayya's nephew, Krishnayya, prevailed upon the Swami to complete the text. It was a free translation of the Sanskrit original and the Swami added a preface containing the essence of the work. The book was printed with the money donated by Uddandi Nayanar.

Alongside the writing activity the study of Vedanta was also going on. On the hill there was a *sadhu* Padmanabha Swami known as Jataswami who had a number of books on Mantra sastra, Ayurveda, Vedanta Sastra and several other Sanskrit works. The Swami would visit Jataswami's residence to study them. One reading was sufficient for him to grasp the contents as well as to remember them. The Swami also discussed these topics with *pandits* and thus acquired a knowledge of scriptural texts. Even experts in various sastras would visit him to get some points clarified.

Thus the Swami picked up Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam by speaking to various persons in those languages. To start with he learnt by mere hearing, but in course of time he began learning through a study of books which enabled him to acquire a good command of all these languages.

Though a scholar himself, the Swami did not approve of mere sastraic knowledge. He expressed his views in this regard both in the Anubandham of *Ulladu Narpadu* (*Reality in Forty verses*-Supplement) and *Ramana Gita*, as follows:–

> The unlettered are easier saved than those who are learned but unsubdued. The unlettered are free from the clutches of the demon Pride, they are free from the malady of many whirling thoughts and words; they are free from the mad pursuit of wealth, they are free from many, many ills. -Verse 36. *Reality in Forty Verses* (supplement)
>
> – Tr K. Swaminathan

"The seeker of knowledge does not achieve his end merely by a study of the scriptures. Without *upasana* there cannot be attainment for him; this is definite"

– *Ramana Gita,* I. 22

The purpose of learning the sastras is to ensure that one acquires the capacity to discriminate between the true and the false. To assume that salvation lay only in such knowledge was wrong, according to the Swami.

In his teachings also the Swami never followed any tradition. He did not need anyone else's opinion. For him his own experience was the basis. He quoted his own experience in discussions or in teaching because the listeners had faith in his experiential knowledge. For his devotees, he was the standard.

His way was the path to nonduality (*advaita*), his method was one of critical analysis, not mere logic. For this reason dogmatists of various schools were never satisfied with him. If they came to him to show off their learning, the Swami became silent. They would argue endlessly but with no response forthcoming they would depart disappointed. The Swami was an expert in practice. We shall say more about this in the pages that follow.

20. Sivaprakasam Pillai

"Rama! This enquiry into the Self or 'Who am I?' is the fire which burns up the seeds of the evil tree which is the mind."

– Yoga Vasishta

SIVAPRAKASAM Pillai was a student of Philosophy at college. Even as a student the question of "Who am I?" arose in him. Before he could find an answer to the question by himself, he qualified as a graduate and got appointed in the Revenue Department of Arcot district. When he visited Arunachala in 1902 on inspection work, he heard people extol the silent Brahmana Swami on the hill as a pure, realised soul and as one who was also an embodiment of detachment. He visited the Swami expecting that he would be able to solve the question which arose in him while he was a student.

Replies to thirteen of Pillai's questions were given by the Swami through gestures and writings either on sand or slate. Pillai copied them and published them after a lapse of over two decades, in 1923, under the title *Who Am I ?* While the Swami's earlier works, *Spiritual Instructions* (*Vichara Sangraha*) and *Vivekachoodamani* contained the teaching of others also, *Who Am I ?* was entirely Swami's. Hence it may rightly be described as the first of the Swami's teachings

imparting the *Jnana marga*. The Swami had disclosed his Self experience in the form of a theory even so early.

Pillai sought the Swami's guidance for his personal benefit but there was no reaction from the latter. But the spark of *vairagya* got ignited in him. Possibly as a consequence, he resigned his job in 1910.

In 1913, Pillai's wife passed away, which resulted in his having to choose between re-marrying or remaining single. The former meant that he would have to spend substantial money to obtain a bride according to the custom of his community and money was hard to come by. After much thought, he wrote down the following questions on a paper:

1. What have I to do to escape the sorrows of the world?
2. Will I be able to marry a girl of my choice?
3. If not, why not?
4. If the marriage were to take place how would I be able to raise the necessary money?

He visited the temple of Ganesa one night and placed this piece of paper near the image and prayed "Oh! Lord, you are my only refuge. Before the night is out please answer my questions either orally or in writing. I shall not flout your command. If you do not respond, my only refuge will be the Brahmana Swami". Pillai's faith in the Lord was so intense that he spent the whole night at the temple awaiting answers to his questions. There was no reply. It looked as if Vinayaka had made it a point to direct his devotees to Arunachala. Pillai left the stone image

which did not hear or see in spite of having ears and eyes and approached the living Sadguru, Ramana.

At Virupaksha cave the Swami had only one occupation, and only one teaching. It was about the *atma*, experience and enquiry. To such a one what could Pillai submit? In fact, the very life of the Swami was a reply to his questions. He was a bachelor with no thought of marriage, he was poor yet was always happy, if at all he had any desire it was obvious in his teaching. Pillai thought that the Swami taught him to give up desire and follow his example. Pillai gave up all thought of marriage and planned to go home, but before returning he visited the Swami on May 4, 1913 to seek his blessings. There were a number of visitors surrounding the Swami. Pillai sat close to him and was intensely looking at him. In a little while he saw a brilliant light around the Swami, also a boy with a golden body emerged from his head and gradually re-entered him. The scene repeated itself twice at which Pillai was stunned. He could bear it no longer. It became obvious to him that the Swami was capable of bestowing his blessings on devotees. Overcome by emotion, Pillai shed tears of joy and sobbed. He could not utter a single word to express his feelings. The other visitors who did not experience the vision wondered at Pillai's sobbing. After sometime, Pillai became normal and narrated his experience to others. They dismissed the whole thing as a result of his consuming drugs, but Pillai was in a such a state that he did not care to retort.

The following day, Pillai visited the Swami and sat in front of him. This time he saw cool moonlight

enveloping the Swami with the Swami himself being at the centre of it in the form of the rising sun fully smeared with *vibhuti* (something which the Swami never did) and drops of nectar coming out of the eyes. Those sitting beside him saw nothing. It did not occur to Pillai to ask the Swami its meaning nor did the Swami bother to explain the vision. Two days later Pillai visited the Swami again. This time the Swami's body appeared as a clear and transparent crystal. Pillai was floating in a space of bliss, and lest he lose that state, he did not move either.

Were these miraculous events possible? If so, why were they not visible to the others? Those who saw Pillai could not fail to have noticed that he was not the type of a person who could utter a lie in a matter like that. It was within the experience of those who stayed near Bhagavan that a transformation took place in their mind and that their latent tendencies would change. Of course, Bhagavan's grace also was explicit.

Pillai concluded that the visions were a manifestation of the Swami's grace towards him, and he gave up all thought of marriage or worldly desire, and decided to stay back and perform *tapas* as a celibate.

Pillai was a good poet. He wrote a poem entitled *Anugraha Ahaval* in Tamil narrating the Swami's grace towards him

Pillai who lived at his native village near Chengam as a *tapasvin* left his body on 13 January 1947.

21. Echammal

"How can I describe the good fortune of Sabari?"
– Tyagaraja

LAKSHMI Ammal, usually referred to as Echammmal, belonged to Mandakolutur about twenty miles away from Arunachala. At one time she lived at Karedu village in Nellore district where her husband was posted. Her first born, a boy, passed away. Later she had a boy and a girl.

One night, in a dream, a young boy clad in a cod piece and with a clean shaven head placed something in her hand and disappeared. He was possibly a *sannyasi.* She consulted a person knowledgeable in omens, who said that the boy was Kumaraswami, the family deity of her in-laws. She concluded that he gave her a *prasadam* in the dream but she had no way of knowing the form of the *prasadam*.

Her husband was transferred to Kandukuru. The same form once again appeared in Echammal's dream and placed a letter, written in Sanskrit script, in her hand. She told him that she could not read that script whereupon the form indicated to her whom she should consult. That person was a Sanskrit *Pandit* living in the same town. She went to him. He also said that it was Subrahmanya's *prasadam* and initiated her in an appropriate *mantra.*

Calamities befell her almost all at one stroke. Her son, daughter and husband passed away one after the other in quick succession. She bore them stoically and went back to her place with her last daughter. When the girl was about ten Echammal fixed up her marriage. A few days before the wedding the girl developed high fever. Again in her dream the boy appeared and said "Three births of yours are over. Viswanatha is asking for you. Come to the hill." A few days after the dream the girl passed away.

Echammal lost her last support and life became miserable. The village and the cottage where she lived were full of memories and on that account became intolerable. The words of consolation offered by her relatives were unbearable. Thinking that a change of place would do her good she obtained the permission of her father to visit pilgrim spots where she could be of service to *sadhus.* She stayed at the pilgrim centre of Gokarna on the western coast and served *sadhus*. She learned *ashtanga yoga* from a *guru* who came from the north. But her agony continued to smoulder and she saw no one who could extinguish it.

She returned to her place in 1906 in the same mood as she left. Though she did so, she had a firm belief that service to a *sadhu* was the only way her grief could subside. A relative of hers advised her to visit Arunachala where "Brahmana Swami lives. He is only twenty five and has extraordinary powers. He will be able to help you in your distress." The relative also encouraged her saying that even

if the Swami was silent those who served him with full faith were bound to benefit from it. Thereupon she left for Arunagiri. She had relations there but she decided to stay away from them. Accompanied by a friend she visited the Swami who was then staying at Virupaksha cave. She noticed that the form which had appeared in her dreams three times earlier was of this very Sadguru. She sat in silence for an hour. The Swami was as usual silent. She was not inclined to return, it was as if her feet got planted there. Yet she had to return. On reaching home she told her friend that the oppressive weight in her heart torturing her in the recent past had gone.

From that day she regularly visited the *ashram,* like an iron filing attracted to a magnet. She also began serving food to the Swami. She used the money sent by her father, and later by her brother, for the service of the Swami and his disciples. She would prepare food for them and serve it wherever they went. For a number of Ramana devotees her house became a lodging place.

Nobody knew how her tears dried up. Even if memories of her husband and children arose she would not be overwhelmed by sorrow as in the earlier days. All that she knew was that it was due to the *guru's prasadam* and grace. The Swami was her mother, father, *guru* and God. Her great reward was peace and devotion. She would accept anything that happened to her as Swami's grace and would promptly report to him.

With the permission of the Swami she adopted her niece, Chellammal, and performed her marriage. She

named her grandson after Ramana. One day, she received a telegram from her son-in-law saying that Chellammal had passed away- which came as a bolt from the blue. It was as if the old agony would once again overwhelm her but things were different by then. She had her saviour. She went to the Swami and showed him the telegram. The Swami was moved, he shed tears. The Swami was "one with those in distress!" Echammal attended the final rites and returned, carrying her grandson Ramana, as a symbol of her daughter's memory. She placed the infant in the Swami's lap, as she believed that both for herself and the child the Swami was the sole refuge. The Swami who recognised the intensity of Echammal's sorrow, once again shed tears. Though Echammal's comfort was shattered by destiny, service-oriented as she was, she did not have to try hard to overcome her latest shock.

It is assumed by some that though *jnanis* may be endowed with a kind heart they do not sympathise with the sorrows of the common people. For one who was the manifestation of Easwara could sympathy and affection towards his children be unusual?

The Swami dispelled Echammal's sorrow first and then gave her his *upadesa.* Earlier she had practised concentration on the nose and meditating on the brilliant light emanating there. She spent hours and days in a state of ectasy because of that. On one occasion when she was thus seated, totally oblivious of the outer world, the owners of the house mistook her to be dead and ran to the Swami to inform him. He heard the news and kept quiet. Later she told the Swami

how she practised *yoga*. The Swami said, "The brilliant light is a vision, it is not the *atma* realising which is your goal. Why do you go after lesser things?" Thus he taught her, diverted her from the *yoga marga* and put her on the path of self enquiry. She had full faith in him and followed his *upadesa*. The Swami showed her his grace in several ways. Here are a couple of such instances.

One day while Echammal was climbing the hill carrying food for the Swami there was a heavy downpour. She took shelter at a particular place and looked at the Swami who was not far away. She observed that the area surrounding him was absolutely dry whereas at a little distance from him it was raining heavily!

On another occasion, a *Pandit* from the North visited the Swami at Virupaksha cave and was discussing some subtle points with the Swami. When Echammal reached the cave as usual she was astonished at what she saw. She began trembling when the Swami asked her the reason. She narrated her experience thus: On reaching the Sadguru Swami cave on her way, she felt that there were two persons - one of whom was the Swami and the other the visitor close by. Without halting she moved along. As she was doing so a voice said "Why climb when he is here?" When she turned back she could see nobody at the spot or nearabouts. She trembled with fear at this experience and somehow reached Virupaksha cave. The Sastry then said to the Swami. "You have been speaking to me here but appeared before her at a different place! You have not blessed me with your grace similarly."

The Swami merely said that because Echammal was constantly thinking of him she saw his form elsewhere. But the question still remained as to why she should see the visitor also!

Another day as Echammal was going towards the cave of the Swami she noticed on the top of a tree a crow poking a parrot . As the parrot fell to the ground Echammal picked it up and took it to the Swami. Despite careful nursing by the Swami the parrot died after a few days. The Swami arranged for the burial of the parrot and pronounced that a building would rise at the spot. Just as he said, subsequently, a building arose close by. The cave adjacent to it got the name *Kili guha* (Parrot cave).

The Swami never subscribed to the view that women were not fit for self-enquiry. Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni's wife Visalakshi once asked Bhagavan about this. He replied that women who abided in the Self could become renunciates too and that upon death their bodies should be buried. This point is referred to in *Sri Ramana Gita* (Chapter 13).

Echammal was a *sattvic* devotee. With all her devotion to the Swami she never ignored other great souls. She had great devotion for Seshadri Swami also who was pleased with her goodness and devotion. Seshadri Swami who neither allowed others to come near him nor go to others, would visit Echammal's house. He escorted her back home a number of times when she returned from the *ashram*, if it was dark by then. One day, a *Pandit* was reciting a *Purana* and explaining it in Echammal's house. Suddenly Seshadri Swami appeared there. The *Pandit*

contemptuously said of him, "Will people of this type ever obtain *jnana* even in a thousand births?" Echammal felt bad and thought within herself that it would be fitting if Seshadri Swami gave a discourse to vanquish the *Pandit's* pride. On his own, Seshadri Swami gave a discourse without the aid of any book for about an hour and mesmerised the audience with his scholarship.

On another occasion, Seshadri Swami visited her when Echammal was performing her *pooja* and asked her what she was doing. She replied that she was worshipping the pictures of Seshadri Swami and Ramana. Seshadri Swami asked her why she did not meditate. Echammal knew about meditation but in order to elicit it from Seshadri Swami asked him to teach her how meditation was to be done. At once, Seshadri Swami sat there in *padmasana* and demonstrated how to meditate. He also fell into *samadhi* and stayed in that state for about four hours at the end of which he merely said "Have you noticed?" And went his way. Those who knew his nature could easily guess what a great blessing it all was.

The Swami rid Sivaprakasam Pillai of worldly desires and put him on the path of enquiry. He did the same for Echammal also. But for the Swami's grace how could a person immersed in sorrow because of worldly affairs, get on to the path of self-enquiry?

22. Ganapati Muni

IT was 1903. Bhagavan was seated at Adimudi shrine surrounded by disciples. A scholar from Andhra came and interpreted the famous invocatory sloka

"Suklambaradharam Vishnum sasivarnam catur bhujam prasanna vadanam dhyayeth sarva vighnopasantaye"

as if it applied to Bhagavan in this manner:"He also wears a white cloth *(Kaupina)*; as he abides in the Self he is Vishnu (all pervading), he has devoured (destroyed) *Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Chitta and Ahamkara*. He has a peaceful countenance, he removes all obstacles in the way of those who meditate."

The following year the same scholar visited Arunachala during Kritikkai and recited the one thousand slokas, entitled *Sivasahasri*, extolling the Deity. The listeners were very pleased with the scholarship and beautiful style of the composition.

Everyone wondered who that person of simple appearance but with profound scholarship was. They came to know that he was from Andhra and belonged to Kaluvarayi *agraharam* near Bobbili. His name was Kavya Kantha Ganapati Sastry. They expressed their appreciation of the gifted and blessed being of rare talents.

Truly Ganapati was a blessed child. In 1878 his father Narasimha Sastry was performing *japa* at Kasi in front of

Vinayaka's image. He suddenly felt that a small boy was advancing towards him fromVinayaka. That was also the time when his baby son was born back home. The father named the child Ganapati.

Till he reached the age of five all kinds of ailments including dumbness troubled Ganapati. In his sixth year he was branded with a hot iron rod upon which all ailments left him. He was also able to speak thereafter.

He then began his studies. Thereafter his life was miraculous with unexcelled intellectual skills of great comprehension, phenomenal memory and amazing intuition.

There was nothing he could not understand, nothing he could not commit to memory after hearing once, no *sastra* that was not grist to his intellectual mill. By the time he was ten, he had memorized several *kavyas*. In Astrology he was capable of drawing up a *panchangam*. He also had the capacity to compose Sanskrit verses extempore. As he studied epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* two great ambitions arose in him. One was to become a great poet like Vyasa and Valmiki - and why not, he thought, was he not already capable of composing poetry? The other ambition was this: in the *puranas rishis* like Viswamitra, and devotees like Dhruva had by the power of their *japa* become capable of creating a fresh world or obtaining an abiding place in the firmament. Why not he also become one like them? With such great ambitions the lad continued his studies.

By the time he was twelve, Ganapati composed a Sanskrit Kavya, *Bhringasandesa* in the *mandakranta* metre

imitating the poet, Kalidasa. Within a couple of years he was proficient in *Chandas, Vyakarana, Kavyas*, and *Puranas*. He was an extempore poet, an *ashtavadhani* and an orator. In 1900, while he was at Kasi his friends encouraged him to visit Nawadweepa to participate in the scholars' meet held there. At that meet of great and reputed scholars, he demonstrated his unmatched literary gifts and talents. Thus he earned the title "Kavya Kantha," At that time, he was barely twenty two.

For the fulfilment of his second ambition, Ganapati got initiated in several *mantras*. Among these, his favourite was the Siva *panchakshari*. In order to perform *japa* in the prescibed manner, he studied a number of *agama sastras*. He mastered all the spiritual literature in Sanskrit.

He got married at the age of eighteen but with the permission of his father and wife he left on a pilgrimage to the banks of Ganga, Narmada and Godavari to perform *japa*. He visited almost all the holy places of India twelve times, for performing *japa*. Though there were occasional spiritual experiences he did not obtain the *darshan* of Siva, which he desired ardently.

At Varanasi, the pleased goddess gave him honey in a dream. At Nasik the temple priest mistook him for a thief and the people of the place beat him up. In anger, he cursed that the people of Nasik should also be hurt like himself physically. Within one month, an unprecedented cyclone struck the town and hurt the people. He had divine powers but they were of no avail to himself!

As Ganapati Sastry was studying *Vedic* literature there arose before his mental eye the glorious Aryan civilisation where people lived in harmony and discipline and were generally happy and peaceful. He compared it with the conditions obtaining in the country in his own time where people were rigid and lifeless. The people made themselves inflexible and bound themselves to various customs and above all, occupied the first place among the enslaved nations of the world!

He then resolved that he should reform society and restore ancient values. For this, he decided to bring together and lead young men dedicated to eradicating all the divisive forces in society and to performing *mantra japa* as the *rishis* of ancient times did so that a new Aryan society could be built. In this endeavour, Ganapati thought, *mantra japa* was the key.

Ganapati chanted the *Sivapanchakshari* a billion times; so also he wrote down the name of the Deity a billion times all of which had gone waste. In 1904 Ganapati was appointed as a Telugu *pandit* at Vellore. He began taking practical steps to realise his ideal and gathered a band of disciples round him. He spent his time in teaching than in imparting *mantra japa* to the students. He felt even that was not fruitful and decided to resume *mantra japa* at Arunachala and reached that place in 1907.

Even that was useless in that in spite of all his learning he could not grasp the implication of *mantra japa*. He was sorry that years of *japa* did not secure for him the *darshan* of his *ishta devata.*

During the Krittikai festival of November 1907 while Ganapati was seated in meditation he heard a voice saying that the Deity was asking for him. He opened his eyes but could not see anyone in the vicinity. It was as if it was a disembodied voice. He began walking towards the Arunachaleswara temple, performing his *mantra japa* within. As he came near, the temple car which had not moved till then began moving. Ganapati prostrated there but even then the Diety did not grant a *darshan*. Ganapati's grief only increased. The following afternoon he sat in a disciple's house quietly and the name *Brahmanaswami* occurred to him suddenly. Then he thought that the Swami who had direct experience of the Self would know the secret behind *japa* and that he would be able to solve his problem.

He resolved to seek the *Brahmanaswami's* refuge. He was not sure whether the Swami would still remember his interpretation of the sloka *Suklambaradharam* but thought he would still seek the Swami's guidance. The Swami was his only saviour, he concluded. Ganapati Sastry immediately set out for the hill in the hot midday sun.

By the time the emotion-charged Ganapati reached Virupaksha cave, the Swami was sitting alone on a rock. Ganapati prostrated before him and clasped his feet with both hands and in a choked voice said,

I have studied all that has to be studied. I have learnt *Vedanta sastra* completely. I have performed *mantra-japa* to my heart's content. But till now I have not been able to grasp what *tapas* really means. I have now approached you

to know what it is. Please enlighten me on the nature of *tapas.*

The Swami fixed his gaze on Ganapati for fifteen minutes. Ganapati was awaiting the reply anxiously. No one else intruded and disturbed them. The Swami spoke in Tamil- "If you enquire and observe where this I-thought arises from, the mind gets absorbed in it. That is *tapas*. While performing *mantra japa* if you enquire and observe where the sound of the *mantra* arises from, the mind gets absorbed in it. That is *tapas.*"

The tormented heart of Ganapati had instant solace and got pacified. He recognised that after the Vedic times this was the only *upadesa* of its kind. A new path for attaining *moksha* was indicated here. Nobody else had discovered this path earlier. The Swami, the *yogi* par excellence, had spelt out his supreme *upadesa* to the mortal Ganapati at the sacred spot of Arunachala in appreciation of Ganapati's prolonged *japa*. Subsequently, this *upanishad* was taught to disciples and seekers all over the world.

Those who saw the path to *moksha* were *rishis*. Ramana who showed this unique path was also a *Maharshi*.

Ganapati Sastry stayed for some hours there and after ascertaining the name of the *Brahmama Swami* he composed extempore five *slokas* in praise of "Ramana". At that time Sastry was not aware that Lakshmana Ayyar had referred to the boy Venkataraman as Ramana. Ganapati was instrumental in reviving the name which had fallen into disuse. The next day, Ganapati gave the *upadesa* to his disciples and told them that it was given by Ramana.

He also enjoined on them to refer to the Swami as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. This name became world famous.

By definition, a person with the following attributes is traditionally referred to as a *rishi* – one who is celibate, one who performs severe penance, one with complete control over passions, one who is absolutely truthful and one who has mastered the *Vedas* and *Vedangas*.

The syllables "*bhaga*" in the word Bhagavan meant prosperity, perfection, dharma, fame, *sreyas*, *jnana*, *vairagya* and the like. Both the words 'rishi' and 'bhagavan' were appropriate in the case of Ramana. Ganapati felt that he got the *upadesa* due to the grace of Goddess Uma. As a token of gratitude, he composed *Umasahasram* (one thousand slokas in praise of Uma) and dedicated the book to her-all in three weeks. Inspired by the divine presence of the Maharshi he dictated the last three hundred slokas to four amanuenses. The Maharshi who was watching silently till then asked, "Has everything been noted?" Kavyakantha submitted that it was all noted. Those *slokas* are held to be Maharshi's but merely voiced by Ganapati. Though he revised several *slokas* of the work subsequently, Ganapati found nothing to revise in the last three hundred *slokas*.

In the first three months of 1908 the Maharshi, Ganapati, and other disciples stayed at the Pachaiamman Kovil at the foothill of Arunachala. Most of the expenses relating to the stay were borne by Ramaswamy Ayyangar, a devotee. During that period, Ganapati, took to meditation

as taught by Bhagavan. One dawn, a brilliant light arose and touched the forehead of the Maharshi six times, Ganapati noticed this and also observed that the light got absorbed in the aura around the Maharshi's head as six star-like formations.

Though he practised the Maharshi's way Ganapati's original ideals did not leave him. Towards the end of March (1908) he wanted to leave Arunachala and asked the Maharshi whether the enquiry into the source of the 'I-thought' would result in the fulfilment of his ideals or whether he had to do *mantra japa* also. The Maharshi replied that the former was enough. Ganapati also asked the Maharshi whether his intention was good, to which the latter replied "Leave everything to God, your burden will cease and He will take on your burden. He knows what to do."

Much later Bhagavan said, "While God sustains the burden of the world, the spurious ego assumes its burden grimacing like an image on a tower seeming to support it."

Reality in forty verses - Supplement verse 17
– Tr. K. Swaminathan

With the Maharshi's permission Ganapati left Arunachala in 1908 for Tiruvottiyur near Madras for performing *tapas.* He performed *tapas* in a Ganesa temple for eighteen days. On the last day he had a problem during the *tapas* and felt that it would be fine if the Maharishi were to give his *darshan*. He was asleep while being, wide awake. All of a sudden Ramana arrived there and sat by

Ganapati's side. Surprised at this, Ganapati tried to get up but the Maharshi pressed him on the head and made him sit. Ganapati felt as if an electric current had passed through him. He took it to be initiation by hand *(hasta-diksha)*.

Ever since 1896 the Maharshi never left Arunachala but how can anyone account for Ganapati's experience?

About twenty one years later, on 17 Oct 1929 to be precise, Ganapati narrated his experience to the Maharshi. The Maharshi also confirmed it, saying, "Several years ago I was resting at Virupaksha cave. I was not in *samadhi.* Yet I felt as if the body was floating in air. As the upward floating continued all material objects vanished from my sight, only white light was all around. Suddenly the body began descending and objects came into view. I thought this was what was meant by the disappearance and reappearance of those with occult powers *(siddhas)*. It struck me that it was Tiruvottiyur and I walked along a main road. As I did so I noticed a Ganesa temple at a distance and I went in. I do not remember what I did or what I spoke. At that stage I woke up and found myself to be asleep at the Virupaksha cave. I narrated this experience at once to Palaniswami."

Ganapati in turn confirmed that the description of the Ganesa temple as given by the Maharshi was accurate.

Kavya Kantha would visit Arunachala occasionally to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan. Between 1922 and 1929 he stayed at Arunachala with his family. Once, while at the mango tree cave the bones of his skull loosened and

he experienced a softening of the area where the *Brahma-randhra* exists.

Ganapati himself confessed that however much he tried to follow the *jnana marga* he had not been able to achieve abidance in the Self. In the first years possibly the latent tendencies proved to be insurmountable obstacles. Also, the activities of the *sakti* in the body were intense which it could not bear. On such occasions he would seek Bhagavan's help and get over that.

Ganapati Sastry used to say that *sakti* was of two types- *mahas* and *sahas* of which the former was divine and that only when *sahas* got transformed as *mahas* the bones of the skull loosend. Because of this *sakti* he could not bear to touch any metallic object and he always had to wear sandals made of wood. A number of his disciples also had experienced that *sakti.* Any copper coin held in the palm became golden.

Bhagavan had great love for Ganapati Sastry. His erudition, exalted ideals, and the power of his *tapas* endeared him to Bhagavan. But for Ganapati's encouragement Bhagavan would not have composed poetry in Sanskrit and Telugu.

Bhagavan addressed Ganapati as "Nayana" as did the latter's disciples. Ganapati was a great man with extraordinary foresight, and power of speech.

One may go to the extent of saying that he was a *Vidyadhara* in human form. His glory can be fully appreciated by going through Kapali Sastry's *Vasishta Vaibhavam*. But for his ideals and love of the country

which bound him, Ganapati would have attained Self reatisation.

He wrote a lot of poetry in praise of Bhagavan, one of these poems, *Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat* was recited in Bhagavan's presence every morning. It is still recited at Bhagavan's shrine.

In order to realise his ambitions Ganapati participated in politics and social reform activities till 1930. Thereafter he gave them up and devoted himself to *tapas*. He left his mortal body on 25 July 1936 at Nimpura near Kharagpur in his *ashram*.

More than the service he did for Bhagavan, Ganapati's service to the nation in propagating Bhagavan's message is greater. The answers Bhagavan gave to the questions of the disciples were incorporated as *slokas* in *Sri Ramana Gita* composed by Ganapati Sastry. This book is an invaluable guide to all. Simirarly, he translated into Sanskrit Bhagavan's *Ulladu Narpadu* under the title *Sat-darsanam*. As early as 1903 Ganapati Muni, through his foresight, recognised the greatness of Bhagavan and spread the word. Under his guidance, his disciples Pranavananda and Kapali Sastry wrote commentaries on Bhagavan's *Upadesasaram* and *Sat-darsanam* respectively. Kapali Sastry also wrote an excellent commentary on Bhagavan's *Arunachala Pancharatna*. Ganapati's disciples were all Bhagavan's disciples too. They were spread all over the country and they carried forward Bhagavan's message.

23. Ramaswami Iyer

IN April 1908, Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer, a supervisor in the PWD at Tiruvannamalai visited the Maharshi at the Virupaksha cave. A friend who accompanied him felt that the visit was a waste. But Ramaswami Iyer desired to have Maharshi's *darshan* again. So, he visited the Maharshi again all by himself. The Maharshi was at that moment quite alone.

For some unaccounted reason there was an emotional upsurge in Iyer on seeing the Maharshi and he asked him, "Swami, great souls like Jesus arose on the earth to redeem sinners. Is there no hope for me?" The Swami was moved and rising from his seat said in English, "Yes there is hope, there is hope, there is hope." Iyer noted this in his diary, a habit he had cultivated since then.

Iyer not only came from a family with a tradition of music, he himself was a composer. On the very day of this visit he composed a song which means: "You are my refuge. I have none else to turn to. You are a sweet and fragrant bouquet of flowers charming to the bees of the devotees swarming at your feet." Subsequently he composed several songs among which the one with the refrain, "In you I take refuge" (*Saranagati* song) is extremely beautiful and moving.

Subsequently, Iyer visited the Maharshi in the evenings whenever possible. On one occasion, the Maharshi sat absorbed in silence for half an hour and later looked at Iyer. The latter at once felt a hot current flow into him. He had a similar experience on another occasion also.

Iyer suffered from indigestion and sleeplessness. Because of these problems he felt uneasy in his head and could not sleep one night. The Maharshi asked him what the matter was. Soon thereafter Iyer felt normal in the head and could sleep soundly.

It was the eighteenth day of the Tamil month, Adi of the year, Sowmya. A lady devotee brought delicacies specially prepared for the occasion for the Maharshi and his devotees. Owing to his dyspepsia Iyer could not partake of anything other than thin gruel. But at the Maharshi's insistence on that occasion he partook of good, rich food. Strangely, it had no effect on him and he also slept soundly.

Thus he began experiencing the grace of the Maharshi even in minor physical matters and came to rely on him without any care. The family members of Iyer at first demurred at his going and staying with the Maharshi but after learning that his indigestion got miraculously cured they no longer objected and began sending his food to the hill. Ailments which did not yield to expensive medication vanished at the mere look of the Maharshi. This *diksha* by sight of the Maharshi was more potent than that by touch.

The one *upadesa* Bhagavan gave to Iyer was, "Never forget your Self, any forgetfulness is harmful." Here are

some extracts of Ramaswami Iyer's diary to show his attitude:

> "Whenever I am forgetful of the Self I become low and beastly. When I am conscious of "I am" there is no more bad nature. How happy I feel when once I enquire "Who am I ?" and come by another stream to the brain! The very act of questioning involves using the will. The greater the will power, the greater is the happiness. The reverse also is true. I have no doubt about this."

The substance is this: the Sakti of the *atma* is superior to all and through the method of enquiry it can be strengthened. With that, not only the sufferings of the soul but even those of the body can be eliminated. The Maharshi always abided in the Self. In his very presence every infirmity vanished!

24. Harassment by *Sadhus*

LONG ago Sankara said that there were far too many pretenders among *sadhus.* The scriptures have condemned them, yet their number has increased and in the present times substantial amounts are wasted by the public on them. Such hypocrites have anger as well as fear towards true *sannyasis* and hence do everything possible to harm them. But the reputation of truly noble men only gets enhanced by such acts of the pretenders, whose true nature gets revealed.

From the very moment the Swami settled down on the hill, Arunachala, the income of the hypocritical *sadhus* began dwindling and instead started pouring at the Swami's feet. The Swami's great *vairagya* and his teachings were attracting people in large numbers. This caused heartburn to the *sadhu* pretenders. Among them was one, Jataswami who had some *tapas* to his credit and was also learned. In fact, the Swami used to visit him frequently and consult the books available with him. Jataswami was celibate and frugal in his eating habits but his great weakness was jealousy. He had the habit of rolling rocks towards any real *sadhu* who attempted to settle on the hill and most of them went away apprehending some approaching

earthquake. Jataswami employed the same trick towards the Swami but it had no effect; on one such occasion the Swami climbed up further and caught the elderly Jataswami who, strangely, not only did not express any remorse but merely laughed it off as a practical joke.

Jataswami's friend was Balanandaswami, a peculiar Brahmin character. He was acquainted with English, French, Marathi, Hindustani, Sanskrit and Malayalam. He studied the *Prasthana Traya* (scriptures). Appearance-wise also he was attractive with sharp features and good complexion. He also had the gift of the gab and by spinning yarns was able to win over any stranger. As darkness is dispelled when the sun rises, with the arrival of the Swami on the hill, Balanandaswami's glamour began to fade. But he was not one to give up. He tried to win over the Swami by all kinds of tricks. He would tell all visitors that the young Swami was his disciple and would ask them to give his "disciple" something to eat. Not only that, he would place a lot of eatables in front of the Swami in the presence of visitors and urge him to eat.

The Swami was guileless yet he could easily notice the hypocrisy of Balanandaswami but was not inclined to act against evil which was why possibly he never exposed him. Quite brazenly Balanandaswami said to the Swami, "I will declare you to be my disciple and make some money thereby. What do you lose, just be silent". After 1908 a number of persons learned and unlearned, rich and poor, children and elderly - became devoted to the Swami. They began showing their resentment towards Balanandaswami

at first indirectly but later, directly. Balanandaswami went to ridiculous lengths to establish himself as the Swami's *guru* without realizing that his acts were harmful to himself. The climax came one night with his passing urine in the verandah of Virupaksha cave before leaving the place. Palaniswami who guessed that it could only be the act of Balanandaswami washed the place. After the Maharshi and others went to have a bath at a distant *teertha,* Palaniswami threw out the bundle of Balanandaswami's clothes, among them were some costly ones too, and left the place locking up the cave. Palaniswami also felt that even if he did not express it the Maharshi must have been revolted at Balanandaswami's act.

Balananda returned and became furious at what happened to his clothes and began ranting "this must be Palani's work". As soon as Palani returned he belaboured him and said to the Maharshi, "This fellow Palani is quite arrogant, see how he threw away my clothes. Get rid of him at once." The Maharshi did not respond, Palani did not stir. With uncontrollable anger Balananda spat on the face of the Maharshi, even then the latter kept silent. For some unknown reason the Maharshi's devotees present at the spot also kept quiet. Another disciple, Muthaiah, living in a different cave got to know of this and with great fury was about to beat the forty year old Balanandaswami with a stick, when the Maharshi intervened and stopped him. Balanandaswami realized that his ways would not succeed and decided to leave the place but even then his pride would not leave him. He said, "This hill does not deserve to be the place for me to

do *tapas"* and left for the railway station. He seated himself in an upper class compartment. Even there he did not behave himself. There was a young couple already seated in the compartment. Balanandaswami began ordering about the young man who, naturally, ignored his commands. Furious at this, Balananda shouted at him: 'By ignoring my words you are insulting me. This is because of your infatuation with this tart." At this, the young man took out his sandals and beat up Balananda. After this treatment, Balananda disappeared from Arunachala.

Two or three years later, when the Maharshi was residing at the mango tree cave, Balananda reappeared, stood before the cave and sent for the Maharshi. The latter, assuming that Balanandaswami was reformed came out. When no one was about, Balananda asked the Maharshi, "Have you heard what had happened at the railway station?". The Maharshi gave an affirmative answer. Balananda resumed, "Possibly, I needed that experience also! I regret having spat on you the other day, when I was beside myself with anger. If you so wish you may now spit on me as many times as you like" and went closer to the Maharshi. The Maharshi who had no trace of revenge in him did nothing of the kind.

But true to his form Balananda began ordering about everybody from the very next day. Naturally, nobody cared. A few days later he came to the mango tree cave and said to the Maharshi, "I shall teach you how to attain *nirvikalpa samadhi."* So saying he forcibly took him to the pial opposite the cave. Turning to Vasudeva Sastry

and other disciples of the Maharshi he said, "What business have you in the company of elders? You had better go." He looked again at the Maharshi and said, "You keep looking into my eyes and take a deep breath." He cautioned the Maharshi to relax-thus he harassed the Maharshi for about half an hour and at the end, he himself fell asleep. The Maharshi and his disciples quietly went back to the Virupaksha cave.

Balananda indulged in such antics on one more occasion. He ordered Rangaswamy Iyengar, a disciple of the Maharshi to fetch a twig for him to brush his teeth. Rangaswamy Iyengar brought a big branch and said, "For the elderly, is this not the appropriate thing?" Balananda ordered another disciple so fetch some fire to light his cigar. He, in turn, brought burning pieces of coal in a huge basin. Bringing it close to Balananda's face he asked, "What should be lighted?"

Balananada realized that the Maharshi's disciples would no longer care for him and thought it better to leave the place before they drove him out. Before leaving, he addressed the Maharshi thus: "This hill is unfit for persons like me. On top of it your disciples have insulted me. It was I who gave you various powers and because of them people are reverential towards you. I am withdrawing all the powers. Henceforth no one will respect you." So saying he left for the town.

He went to a sweetmeat shop owner and boasted about what he had done. The shop owner had great regard for the Maharshi; upon hearing what Balananda said he

got ready to thrash him. With that, Balananda left Arunachala again. Sometime later Balanandaswami returned to the Maharshi and saying that he had no attachment towards the body, he became nude and behaved in a repulsive manner with the Maharshi's attendant. All those present were incensed but the Maharshi was as usual indifferent. After this event Balananda left Arunachala for good. Nobody heard of him any more.

Another *sadhu* also tried to project himself as the Maharshi's *guru.* This Mahaswami had learnt the preliminary lessons of philosophy; he performed *mantra japa,* and was acquainted with music also. He resented the Maharshi who did not perform any *japa* but who still 'earned' a lot of money. He would go to the post office and collect all the letters addressed to the Brahmana Swami (by which name also the Maharshi was known). His justification was that he also was a Brahmin residing on the hill! Once he returned from a pilgrimage to Kalahasti and said to the Maharshi, "I returned only for your sake. I shall initiate you in the Dattatreya-*mantra*". The Maharshi did not jump with joy at this unsought for attention. He was, as usual, indifferent. But the Mahaswami would not give up. "God appeared in my dream and ordered me to initiate you" he said. The Maharshi replied "If He appears in my dream also and orders me to receive the *upadesa* I shall do so". "No, no it is a very brief *mantra,* get up and we shall commence" said the Mahaswami. The Maharshi replied "What is the use of this *upadesa* when I have no inclination towards performing any *Japa?*"

The Mahaswami got angry and whenever any of his visitors expressed a wish to have the *darshan* of the Maharshi, he would try to dissuade them saying that the Maharshi was not great nor learned enough to be able to give any instruction to them. The Maharshi heard this but as usual kept quiet. One day when the Mahaswami was in meditation at the banana grove near the temple he had a vision of the Maharshi who said to him "Don't be deceived," and disappeared. With that, the Mahaswami trembled and realized that Ramana was no ordinary person and that he did possess certain powers. Thereafter he decided not to trifle with the Maharshi. He ran to the Maharshi, and narrating his experience pleaded with him to see that he no longer had such visions. The Maharshi replied calmly "I have no such powers. Further I have no hatred towards you at all." Mahaswami got pacified with these words and went his way.

Round about 1916, a group of *sadhus* planned to abduct the Maharshi. They came to him at the Virupaksha cave in a drunken state and said, "We are from Podigai the place where the sage Agastya is still in penance. He ordered us to take you to Srirangam first, where a meeting of the *siddhas* is on, and later bring you to him. He said that there were some elements still in your body which were preventing your attaining complete *Siddhi* and that he would remove them for your own benefit. He also said that he would initiate you in the proper manner."

The position was critical but the Maharshi just did not utter a single word. Perumalswami who was there,

was quite strong and quick-witted. He intervened and said to the visitors, "We have been already told by God of your impending visit and He ordered us to fry you in a pan. What do you say to this?" He further turned towards Mastan, a fellow disciple, and asked him to make necessary preparations for this. This acted as an excellent antidote which made the visiting *sadhus* run away.

It is not that such "gentlemen" were wanting among the educated classes, either. In the early days of the establishment of the *Ashram* some rich gentlemen of Madras, felt that the administration of the *Ashram* was not being carried out properly. They chartered a bus from Madras and arrived at the *Ashram* with the objective of changing the management or failing that, taking the Maharshi away to Madras. They entered the hall where Bhagavan sat. He was serious, immobile and silent. Each one of the visitors developed cold feet and having nothing to say they simply returned to their bus and went away. The Maharshi later on came to know as to why they came in the first place. He said, "I did not know why they came. Did they come here to imporve the *Ashram* or themselves?"

So long as one lives in the world even a *jnani* may have to face critical situations. There is no escape from *prarabdha* for any one – that is the moral of these episodes.

25. Seshadri Swami

IF to the inhabitants of Arunachala the Maharshi was the sun, Seshadri was the moon. Both were unique, each in his own way. Seshadri was born an Ashtasahasram Brahmin in1870 at Vazhur of Vandavasi taluq. As he lost his father quite early his mother's uncle Kamakoti Sastriar, a musician, *pouranic* and scholar brought him up. Seshadri had a retentive memory and, was proficient in vocal music, and *puranic* lore. At a very early age he mastered the principal Sanskrit classics and was able to compose poetry in Sanskrit.

Seshadri's favourite Deity was Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchipuram. Reciting the five hundred slokas in her praise, *Mukapanchasati*, he went round her shrine day and night. In his fifteenth year he got initiated in the *sakti (Bala) mantra* and carried on spiritual practices at the dead of night alone in a burial ground adjoining a river near the Periandavar shrine. He obtained a vision of the Goddess Sakti.

Thereafter, Seshadri went round several places for acquiring knowledge in *mantras* and finally reached Arunachala in 1890 where he stayed till his end. He had acquired occult powers such as reading other peoples' thoughts, clairvoyance and *vaksiddhi.*

Seshadri avoided the company of people and to ward them off acted like a lunatic throwing stones at people.

On seeing Ramana he noticed that he was a realised soul who abided in the Self. He developed great affection for Ramana.

Seshadri who declined invitations from anyone, on his own used to visit Ramana's place at Pavalakundru occasionally and sit along with Ramana's devotees for a meal. While having his meal Seshadri would sprinkle rice all round, at which Ramana's devotees would object. Seshadri would agree with them and take care to ensure that the rice did not fall on the ground. He also used to visit Echammal's house even without being asked by her. Seshadri loved Maharshi's disciples too and used to advise them to surrender themselves to the Maharshi.

One, Venkatarama Ayyar stood before Seshadri, though with a desire to have the *darshan* of the Maharshi. Seshadri who read his thoughts said, "The Maharshi's *darshan* will purify the mind" and encouraged him to go. Another devotee of the Maharshi, Somasundara Swami, left the Maharshi's *ashram* for certain reasons and was looking for another *guru* and in that connection sought Seshadri's advice. Seshadri Swami grasped what Somasundara Swami was about to ask and said, "Go back to Ramana." But Somasundara Swami was hesitant to do so. Seshadri shouted at him saying "Go, go to Ramana Swami" Somasundaram thereupon returned to the *ashram* immediately, It was midnight by then.

Seshadri always said that one should follow only one path and one *guru*. So if any one with devotion to Ramana came to him he would urge him to go to Ramana. On

one occasion he asked T.V. Subrahmanya Ayyar, who had great devotion towards the Maharshi, "There are three *lingas* here, do you know?"

Ayyar: The hill is the only one. It is the *jyotirlingam.*

Seshadri: Not at all and you know that there are three *lingas.*

Ayyar: I do not know, but what are the other two *lingas,* Swami?

Seshadri: You know them too.

Ayyar: Sorry, I do not know.

Seshadri: People say it is Ramana Swami.

Ayyar: Alright, what is the third?

Seshadri: You know that too.

Ayyar: I do not know, Swami.

Seshadri: The third *lingam* is known as 'Seshadri'.

Ayyar: Is it you?

Seshadri: You know it, isn't it?

Aryyar: I don't know.

Seshadri: Yes it is me.

There were occasions when Seshadri said he was not different from Ramana.

Lakshmi Ammal came to Arunachala in order to serve the Maharshi and stayed with Echammal. One day on her way to the Maharshi's *ashram,* she ran into Seshadri Swami and regretted that she was not able to serve him. Seshadri grasped her unspoken thought and to lessen her grief said to her, "What if the service is there (i.e to Ramana) or here (i.e. to Seshadri)?"

In order to facilitate *dhyana,* a Sastry of Chidambaram used to resort to opium though the Maharshi advised him against it. On one occasion as the opinum was not pure, the mind of the Sastry became perverse and all sorts of thoughts sprang up. Not knowing what to do, he ran to the Kambathu Ilayanar shrine and waited for Seshadri. As soon as he came the Sastry prostrated at his feet and even before he could say anything the Sastry was admonished thus: "I had already advised you against using the drug but you persisted." These were not the words of Seshadri, but of the Maharshi. The Sastry realised that Seshadri said those words to demonstrate that there was no difference between him and the Maharshi.

Tiruvallur Subrahmanya Mudaliar was a businessman who got entangled in litigations in his thrist for acquiring more wealth. Seshadri rebuked him several times on this score. In 1910 Seshadri went to the Mango tree cave where Mudali was in the presence of the Maharshi and said to Mudaliar, "Look, the income of the younger brother is ten thousand per month; for me it is one thousand, Why don't you try to earn at least a hundred?" Mudaliar understood that the 'income' mentioned by Seshadri meant spiritual wealth and that 'Younger brother' meant the Maharshi, yet he replied, "Where is the time Swami, I am immersed in various transactions". Persisting, Seshadri told him several times that '*atma vidya*' was easy but to no avail. On one occasion Seshadri sudddenly said to him "You will be branded a sinner for having killed a Brahman." Mudaliar's heart skipped a beat at that. He ran

to the Maharshi for whom he had great reverence and told him what Seshadri said. The Maharshi consoled him saying "Yes it is true. Because you do not desire to know that you are the Brahman, it amounts to killing Brahman, nothing wrong with that description."

Whether Seshadri worshipped God with attributes or without attributes is dealt with in the chapter on "*Giripradakshina*". It is shown therein that he appeared to have had devotion to the Lord with attributes. He also demonstrated *nirvikalpa samadhi.* Hence it may be appropriate to conclude that he worshipped the Formless One also.

One day, Seshadri stood watching a buffalo in the *agraharam.* V.C. Narayana Ayyar came there and asked him what he was looking at. Seshadri said "This." Ayyar asked him if he was referring to the buffalo. Seshadri turned towards him and asked him to tell him what it was. Ayyar replied, "It is a buffalo". Seshadri said, "Is it a buffalo? You beast, you had better refer to it as Brahman" and walked away. Recollect the *upadesa* of Seshadri to Natanananda also in this context.

Seshadri Swami attained *Siddhi* on January 14, 1929.

26. The Dravidian Poet

SPOKEN word, song and written word have an ascending order of stability. Spoken word and song are sustained by the memory of people but nowadays such people are decreasing in numbers. Even for the written word there is danger if it is not in print. Such a work can always be plagiarised. Further, one can incorporate one's own ideas in it. Anyway, with printed books being available in plenty who will bother to read unprinted books?

Though from ancient times song, verse poetry, and prose work formed a literary hierarchy Bhagavan adopted the universally accepted Silence. Hence his literary activity did not follow the aforementioned order. At the instance of Gambhiram Seshayya *Vichara Sangraham* and *Viveka Choodamani*, two prose works, came first.

In Bhagavan's view silence was the pre- eminent method of imparting instruction. Yet, he wrote for the sake of those devotees who could not absorb his silent teaching. Hence the pattern of his writings doesn't reveal his nature but reflects the mental capacity and maturity of those who sought his instructions. Among those who asked him, his disciples were the foremost-they were Ayyaswami, Palaniswami and Perumalswami. It will be

no exaggeration to say that Bhagavan wrote because of these disciples.

Ayyaswami, who was from Kerala, began his service of the Maharshi in 1918. Everyone agreed that his devotion and service-mindedness were unequalled. In 1910, there was a great function at Sringeri *math*, the *math* established by AdiSankara. On that occasion books of various teachers were exhibited and sold. Ayyaswami bought some of Sankara's works and later requested the Maharshi to render them into Malayalam. The Maharshi translated some parts of *Sankara Vijayam*. At Palaniswami's request the Maharshi translated *Gurusthuthi* and *Hastamalakam* into Tamil.

Gurusthuthi contains the message of Padmapada and other disciples to Sankara who entered the body of the King Amaruka and forgot to get out of it. The message was a repetition of Sankara's teaching itself. *Hastamalakam* contains the reply of Hastamalaka to the question of Sankara as to who he was.

At the time he wrote these poems the Maharshi was not acquainted with Tamil prosody but he was familiar with the rhythm of song due to constant listening. The Maharshi wrote them in that pattern but they conformed to the prosody required of verses.

The next work was *Aksharamanamalai*. Among the works of Bhagavan this is to be regarded as the foremost. The title means "marital garland" *Akshara* means imperishable, it also means alphabet. This song has couplets each of which commences with a letter in the alphabetical sequence of the Tamil language.

In his early days of service to the Swami, Perumalswami used to fetch food for him from a choultry. After some time the authorities of the choultry demanded service from him in exchange for food. As Perumalswami was not inclined to do so he began begging for food. Even if some devotees brought food for the Maharshi and his disciples it was not always sufficient. So some devotees had to go into the town begging. To begin with, Perumalswami and others would sing songs with which people were already familiar. As the Maharshi's disciples they received alms aplenty. Noticing this, some others began imitating them and they also began wearing ochre robes. In order to be marked out as the Maharshi's disciples Palaniswami and others wished to have a special song for them to sing when they went begging.

Normally those going out for begging sang a song with the refrain "SambaSadaSiva, SambaSadaSiva, SambaSadaSiva Hara Hara" At first, the Maharshi composed a few similar lines with the refrain "Arunachala" and stopped. Perumal was awaiting the next lines but was disappointed. One day, the Maharshi went for *giri pradakshina* alone. That day some more lines of the song were composed.

The very name of the song reveals its import (*bhava*); the bride was the *Jiva* (Maharshi himself) the bridegroom was Lord Arunachala. The Maharshi created situations where the bride pined for the bridegroom and thus composed the song.

Normally a pining lover's words would be piteous but when they are accompanied by devotion the effect is

perfect. The bride displays various feelings like self-pity, bashfulness, maturity and hurt at being spurned; all these make the poem exquisite with a remarkable co-mingling of *bhakti* and *sringara*. Like sugar in milk, the poem abounds in *upadesa* of wisdom also. In the original Tamil the words employed have more than one meaning, therefore translating the poem into another language adequately is almost impossible. Those who sing and listen to the song at the *Ashram* are overwhelmed with joy. When the *bhava* is sweet and the words are delicately balanced - this is only to be expected. This song is more delicate and melodious then the songs of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. It soothens the hearts of all devotees.

In the Saiva *agama* called *Devikalottaram* there is a chapter entitled "*Jnanachara vichara patalam*", which details numerous regulations relating to worship. Kuppuswami Raju of Tanjavur noticed that some extracts of the *agamas* contained *slokas* which supported *advaita*, contrary to the constant criticism of *advaita* by Saiva *siddanthis*. He thereupon requested his friend Yagnarama Dikshit to obtain some other passages supportive of *advaita*. This was one of the passages thus obtained. Dikshit during one of his visits to the Maharshi spoke to him about this matter. Bhagavan told Dikshit that earlier one Ramalingam of Vriddachalam showed some manuscripts of *agamas* to him and that one of those was this very chapter.

Yagnarama Dikshit immediately started copying some of them. The Maharshi also took up a chapter for copying,

but he put it aside somewhere. Even at the time the Maharshi composed *Aksharamanamalai* his knowledge of Tamil prosody was incomplete. But later when he learnt prosody he tried out the 'Venba' metre in a few verses. While doing so he recollected the *agama* chapter of *Devikalottaram*. Thus without having the original with him the Maharshi wrote the translation from memory. The Tamil translation follows the *bhava* of each sloka but it is not a literal translation.

During his stay at the Virupaksha cave (i.e. before 1916) the Maharshi collected nine of his verses on Arunachala and collectively named them *Navamani-malai* (*Necklet of Nine gems*).

The first verse has a beautiful *bhava.* At the Sabha (in Chidambaram) Siva danced in front of Sakti whereas at Arunachala he had Sakti within him and became immobile. In the second verse Arunachala is remembered as *Sat-chit-ananda* personified.

One day, while the Maharshi was seated at the Virupaksha cave the phrase "By thy Grace" *(Karunai yaal)* kept on recurring in his mind, and would not leave him even if he wanted to ignore it. Then he decided to compose a verse commencing with that phrase. Next, the concluding phrase of that verse began to haunt him, so he wrote another verse commencing with that phrase. Thus a series of eleven verses followed as a flow. That is how *'Arunachala padikam'* (*Eleven Verses to Sri Arunachala*) was born.

This hymn is suffused with the spirit of devotion. It delineates the devotee's yearning for God's grace. Here are the verses:

1. Now that by thy grace Thou hast claimed me, what will become of me unless Thou manifest Thyself to me, and I, yearning wistfully for Thee and harassed by the darkness of the world, and lost? Oh love, in the shape of Arunachala, can the lotus blossom without sight of the sun? Thou art the sun of suns; Thou causest grace to well up in abundance and pour forth as a stream!

2. Arunachala, Thou form of grace itself! once having claimed me, loveless though I be, how canst Thou let me now be lost, and fail to fill me so with love that I must pine for Thee unceasingly and melt within like wax over the fire? Oh nectar springing up in the heart of devotees! Haven of my refuge! Let Thy pleasure be mine, for that way lies my joy, Lord of my life!

3. Drawing me with the cords of Thy grace, although I had not even dimly thought of Thee, Thou didst decide to kill me outright. How then has one so weak as I offended Thee that Thou dost leave the task unfinished? Why dost Thou torture me thus, keeping me suspended between life and death? Oh Arunachala! fulfil Thy wish, and long survive me all alone, Oh Lord!

4. What did it profit Thee to choose out, me, from all those struggling in *samsara*, to rescue my helpless self from being lost and hold me at Thy feet? Lord of the ocean of grace! Even to think of Thee puts me to shame (Long) mayst Thou live! I bow my head to Thee and bless Thee!

5. Lord! Thou didst capture me by stealth and all these days hast held me at Thy feet! Lord! Thou hast made

me (to stand) with hanging head, (dumb) like an image when asked what is Thy nature. Lord! deign to ease me in my weariness, struggling like a deer that is trapped. Lord Arunachala! what can be Thy will? (Yet) who am I to comprehend Thee?

6. Lord of my life! I am ever at Thy feet, like a frog (which clings) to the stem of the lotus; make me instead a honey-bee which (from the blossom of the Heart) sucks the sweet honey of pure consciousness; then shall I have deliverance. If I am lost while clinging to Thy lotus feet, it will be for Thee a standing column of ignominy, Oh blazing pillar of light called Arunachala! Oh (wide) expanse of grace, more subtle than ether!

7. Oh pure one! If the five elements, the living beings and every manifest thing is nothing but Thy all - embracing Light, how then can I (alone) be separate from Thee? Since Thou shinest in the Heart, a single expanse without duality, how then can I come forth distinct therefrom? Show Thyself planting Thy lotus feet upon the head of the ego as it emerges!

8. Thou hast withheld from me all knowledge of gradual attainment while living in the world, and set me at peace; such a care indeed is blissful and not painful to anyone, for death in life is in truth glorious! Grant me, wasteful and mad (for Thee), the sovereign remedy of clinging to Thy Feet!

9. Oh Transcendent! I am the first of those who have not the supreme wisdom to clasp Thy feet in freedom from attachment. Ordain Thou that my burden be

transferred to Thee and my free will effaced, for what indeed can be a burden to the sustainer (of the universe)? Lord supreme! I have had enough (of the fruits) of carrying (the burden of) this world upon my head, parted from Thee, Arunachala, supreme Self! think no more to keep me at a distance from Thy feet!

10. I have discovered a new thing! This hill, the lodestone of lives, arrests the movements of anyone who so much as thinks of it, draws him face to face with it, and fixes him motionless like itself, to feed upon his soul thus ripened. What (a wonder) is this! Oh souls! beware of It and live! Such a destroyer of lives is this magnificent Arunachala, which shines within the Heart!

11. How many are there who have been ruined like me for thinking this hill to be the Supreme? Oh men who, disgusted with this life of intense misery, seek a means of giving up the body there is on earth a rare drug which, without killing him, will annihilate anyone who so much as thinks of it. Know that it is none other than this Arunachala!

– Tr. K. Swaminathan

In 1916, at Skandasramam, Bhagavan translated into simple Tamil *Dakshinamurti Stotram* and *Gurusthuthi*. By then there was already another translation in long complicated verses, but Bhagavan thought of writing one in simple language to be easily understood by all. (In the chapter entitled "Miracles' below will be seen several instances where the Maharshi showed himself in the form of Dakshinamurti, to several devotees)

The next work was *Arunachala ashtakam* (*Eight stanzas to Arunachala*). One day as the Maharshi was about to start for *giripradakshina*, Palaniswami gave a piece of paper and a pencil to Ayyaswami who was accompanying Bhagavan and asked him to note down if the Maharshi were to compose anything. On that occasion, six verses were composed, which were noted down. That very day or on the following day a devotee by name Narayana Reddi, visited Bhagavan and offered to get the verses printed. The Maharshi added two more verses to make it an *ashtakam* and gave it to Narayana Reddi.

In the *ashtakam* the Maharshi spelt out his philosophy and the way he came to it in detail. From this poem one may discern the opinions held by the Maharshi during that period. In the verses, the Maharshi indicated the reasons for his leaving his home ,what he saw thereafter and what he ultimately learnt. The poem is a succinct statement of his *upadesa* and its nature. Here are the verses:

1. Hearken, It stands as an insentient hill. Its action is mysterious, past human understanding. From the age of innocence it had shone within my mind that Arunachala was something of surpassing grandeur, but even when I came to know through another that it was the same as Tiruvannamalai I did not realise its meaning. When it drew me up to it, stilling my mind, and I came close, I saw it (stand) unmoving.

2. 'Who is the seer?' When I sought within, I watched the disappearance of the seer and what survived him. No thought of 'I saw' arose; how then could the

thought 'I did not see' arise? Who has the power to convey this in word when even Thou (appearing as Dakshinamurti) couldst do so in ancient days by silence only? Only to convey by silence Thy (transcendent) state Thou standest as a hill, shining from heaven to earth.

3. When I approach regarding Thee as having form, Thou standest as a hill on earth. If (with the mind the seeker) looks for Thy (essential) form as formless, he is like one who travels the earth to see the (ever-present) ether. To dwell without thought upon Thy (boundless) nature is to lose one's (separate) identity like a doll of sugar when it comes in contact with the ocean (of nectar; and) when I come to realise who I am, what else is this identity of mine (but Thee), Oh Thou who standest as the towering Aruna Hill?

4. To look for God while ignoring Thee who art Being and Consciousness is like going with a lamp to look for darkness. Only to make Thyself known as Being and Consciousness, Thou dwellest in different religions under different (names and) forms. If (yet) men do not (come to) know Thee, they are indeed blind who do not know the sun, Oh Arunachala the great, Thou peerless gem, abide and shine Thou as my Self, one without a second!

5. As the string in (a necklet of) gems, it is Thou in Thy unity who penetratest all the diversity of beings and religions. If, like a gem when it is cut and polished, the (impure) mind is worked against the wheel of the (pure) mind to free it of its flaws, it will take on the light of Thy grace (and shine) like a ruby, whose fire is unaffected

by any outward object. When a sensitive plate has been exposed to the sun, can it receive impressions afterwards? Oh benign and dazzling Aruna Hill! is there anything apart from Thee?

6. Thou art Thyself the one being, ever aware as the Self-luminous Heart! In Thee there is a mysterious power (*sakti*) which without Thee is nothing. From it proceeds the phantom of the mind emitting its latent subtle dark mists, which illumined by Thy light (of consciousness) reflected on them, appear within as thoughts whirling in the vortices of *prarabdha,* later developing into the psychic worlds and projected outwardly as the material world transformed into concrete objects which are magnified by the out-going senses and move about like pictures in a cinema show. Visible or invisible, oh hill of grace, without Thee they are nothing!

7. Until there is the I-thought, there will be no other thought. Until other thoughts arise, (asking) 'To whom?' (will call forth the reply) 'To me'. He who pursues this closely, questioning 'What is the origin of the I?' and diving inwards reaches the seat of the mind (within) the Heart becomes (there) the sovereign Lord of the Universe. Oh boundless ocean of grace and effulgence called Arunachala, dancing motionless within the court of the Heart! there is no (longer any) dream there of such dualities as in and out, right and wrong, birth and death, pleasure and pain, or light and darkness.

8. The waters rise up from the sea as clouds, then fall as rain and run back to the sea in streams; nothing can

keep them from returning to their source. Likewise the soul rising up from Thee cannot be kept from joining Thee again, although it turns in many eddies on its way. A bird which rises from the earth and soars into the sky can find no place of rest in mid-air, but must return again to earth. So indeed must all retrace their path, and when the soul finds the way back to its source, it will sink and be merged in Thee, oh Arunachala, Thou ocean of bliss!

– Tr. K. Swaminathan

Scholars of Tamil extol Sri Ramana's poetic style as one of surpassing excellence. The language employed is the ordinary day to day one but the style has lilting beauty. The words used have various meanings some of them have exalted concepts hidden beneath the surface. The words are simple but with profound and vast connotations. The meaning of the poems can be grasped according to the capacity of the reader. Elaborate commentaries have been written on Bhagavan's works. Bhagavan's devotional hymns have a beautiful cadence and convey emotions which can overwhelm anyone. They have an attractive brevity too.

By his poetic works also Bhagavan can be considered as an *avatar* of Jnana Sambandar who suckled the breast of the Divine Mother herself.

27. Sri Ramana Gita

IN July 1917, Ganapati Muni and others sat near Bhagavan. During the course of his conversation, Ganapati Muni informed Bhagavan that while he was at Mandasa, Ramanatha Brahmachari had showed him a sloka "*Hridaya kuhara madhye*" written by the Maharshi . The *sloka* means:

"In the interior of the Heart-cave Brahman alone shines in the form of the *Atman* with direct immediacy as I, I. Enter into the Heart with questing mind or by diving deep within or through control of breath and abide in the *Atman*".*

This *sloka* arose in the following circumstances: In 1915, the Maharshi spent the rainy season at Skandasramam. One day Jagadeesa Sastry, sat with a paper in his hand which the Maharshi noticed and enquired about. Sastry said "I have commenced writing a *sloka*. I could compose only the first phrase but could not go any further" Bhagavan took up the paper containing the phrase *"Hridaya kuhara madhye"* (In the interior of the Heart cave). Thereupon he completed the *sloka*.

By that time the Maharshi had not become proficient in Sanskrit. But due to the constant company of Sanskrit scholars like Ganapati Muni several Sanskrit words struck

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* All translations of *Sri Ramana Gita* into English - are by Viswanatha Swami and K. Swaminathan. (*Sri Ramana Gita* - 5th Edition)

him during casual conversations as also when he was in silence. Thus he picked up certain metres like 'Arya' of Sanskrit. Bhagavan expounded his philosophy in this single *sloka* and bestowed a boon on the entire country. All his earlier works were in Tamil. The time had come for the light of Tamilnadu to become the light of India – but that was feasible only through Sanskrit. There was also a need for a book in Sanskrit which was simple, clear and easily intelligible to people who were not necessarily scholarly. It also had to clear doubts which arose during *sadhana.* This thought crossed the minds of all the disciples present. They begged of the Maharshi to clear their doubts and Ganapati Muni to encapsulate them in Sanskrit verses. Both the Maharshi and the Muni assented.

In December 1913, Ganapati Muni stayed at Virupaksha cave with Bhagavan. During the stay he got certain doubts cleared by Bhagavan. He made that dialogue-chapter 1 – of the proposed book. The second chapter was woven round the *sloka* "*Hridaya kuhara madhye*"

Actually that was the only verse of Bhagavan's in the entire book. The book was a compilation of the conversations between Bhagavan and his disciples during the period July 1907 to 25 August 1917. It was named *Ramana Gita*.

Sri Ramana Gita appears to be a commentary on the sloka "*Hridaya kuhara madhye*". The fifth, sixth, and sixteenth chapters entitled respectively, *Hridayavidya*, *Manonigrahopaya* and *Bhakti* make this plain. *Sri Ramana Gita* is a *Yogasastra* supplementing the *Bhagavad Gita*. Also, the book dispels the doubts of the seeker. In *Sri Ramana*

Gita the names of the questioners are merely indicated by their respective *gotras*. Here are some details:

Daivaratha: Gajanana, resident of Gokarna, he compiled *Vibhaktyashtakam* in praise of Bhagavan. Proficient in Vedas and a great devotee.

Bharadwaja (Karshi): Overseer Vaidhyanatha Iyer, son of Krishna Ayyar.

Yoganatha Yatindra: Before taking to *sannyasa* was known as Sankaranarayana.

Kapali Sastry: Commentator of *Sat-darsan* (both in English and Telugu), *Arunachala Pancharatna*, and *Uma Sahasri* of Ganapati Muni. Author of the biography of his *guru* Ganapati Muni, *Vasishta Vaibhavam*. He was for some time employed as a teacher. Became a disciple of Ganapati Muni, later of Sri Ramana and much later of Sri Aurobindo. A good Sanskrit poet.

Visalakshi: Wife of Ganapati Muni.

Bharadwaja Vaidarbha: Resident of Ongole. Name prior to becoming a *sannyasi*, Chivukula Venkata Sastry, and later, Upanishadbhramendra Saraswati.

Amritanatha Yatindra: A Keralite.

Ganapati Muni brought before the world the personality of Bhagavan Ramana through *Ramana Gita*, in the following passages:-

i) (I bow to) Maharshi Ramana, Kartikeya in human form (1.1)

ii) Oh Brahmin, through god-given vision, I behold you again and again as Subrahmanya, the best of Brahmanyas, in human form. (11.7)

iii) Lord, not on Swamimalai, nor on Tiruttani Hill, nor on the top of Venkatachala do you now dwell. In reality you are in Arunachala. (11.8)

iv) Oh Lord! you taught in ancient days, the secret *bhooma vidya* to Maharshi Narada, who served you as a disciple. (11.9)

v) Those learned in the Vedas say you are Brahmarshi Sanatkumara. (11.10)

vi) Only the names differ, not the person. Sanatkumara and Skanda are in reality but synonyms for you. (11.11)

vii) Once before, born as Kumarila the best of Brahmins, you re-established the *dharma* propounded in the Vedas. (11.12)

viii) Oh Bhagavan, when Jains caused confusion in the *dharma*, you came down as JnanaSambandar in Dravidadesa and established the path of devotion. (11.13)

ix) Now again you have come back to earth, Oh glorious one, to safeguard the knowledge of Brahman obstructed by those who are contented with mere scriptural learning. (11.14)

Sri Ramana is Kartikeya, one among the *adhikara devatas*. Kartikeya also appeared as Sanatkumara and Kumarila Bhatta. He appears on the earth whenever the occasion demands. He has now come to save *Brahmajnana*, menaced by mere scriptural knowledge. An elaboration of this hypothesis will be found in the chapter, ''The Nature of the *Avatara*":

> "This pure Ganga, *Ramana Gita* springs from the majestic Mountain, Sri Ramana, and flowing through the poetry of Ganapati, removes impurities at every step and reaches the ocean of the devotee's heart."

At the request of Swami Pranavananda, Ganapati Muni composed a concluding benedictory poem called *Gurugitam*. The descriptions of Ramana in *Ramana Gita* are exquisite and informative; yet they do not equal those in *Gurugitam* which, like the utterances of Vedic rishis, have excellent connotations. *Gurugitam* is like a Vedic verse and serves as a guide to all humanity.

One day, Bhagavan wrote a Sanskrit *sloka* in Arya metre commencing with the phrase "*Karuna purna Sudhabdhey*" (Ocean of nectar, full of grace) and left it like that. It came to the notice of others during the period immediately after *Sri Ramana Gita* was concluded. Ganapati Muni thereupon requested Bhagavan to write five *slokas* with the above *sloka* as a benediction to start with. The other *slokas* would indicate the nature of the *atma*, and the Vichara, Yoga (Karma) and Bhakti paths. That is how *Arunachala Pancharatna* (*Five Stanzas to Sri Arunachala*) came to be composed. It was Gajanana who wrote the *mangala sloka*.

28. Life on the Hill

IN the early days of their stay on the hill the Maharshi and his disciples were menaced by insects, monkeys and other animals. Yet the Maharshi told his disciples that the hill was the territory of the animals and that as guests there it was their duty to ensure that no harm came to the animals on their account. It is said of *sadhus* that they extended protection to all living beings (*abhayam sarva bhutebhyah*). This saying applied to the Maharshi who protected even poisonous insects. Deadly scorpions stung him on three occasions but nothing happened to him.

A snake once crept into Skandasramam. Bhagavan's mother was terrified but he began walking towards the snake very calmly. As he did so the snake began withdrawing and went into a crevice, the Maharshi followed it till that stage. All of a sudden the snake turned back and lifted its hood. It also began steadily looking at Bhagavan who returned the gaze. This game of mutual hypnotising went on for some time. By then the snake presumably grasping that the Maharshi was harmless approached him confidently. It almost touched his feet, and later left. The same snake would often visit the *ashram* for Bhagavan's *darshan* even when he was amidst visitors. The snake would occasionally try to climb on to Bhagavan, but he would not encourage it. There were two peacocks in the *ashram*. They never

attacked the snake. Also, quite surprisingly, the snake would join the peacocks in their dances.

Squirrels, crows and other birds also would show a natural affection for the Maharshi. The latter, in turn, would feed them. A particular crow used to leave its young ones in Bhagavan's care and go out. The Maharshi would take the trouble of feeding them whenever they cried for food.

Monkeys

There seems to be a natural affinity between monkeys and humans. Recall how the monkeys assisted Sri Rama in the *Ramayana.*

Bhagavan was able to converse with monkeys and after a close observation of their ways discovered that they had a social and political structure or hierarchy. On several occasions the monkeys would go to the Maharshi with their disputes for arbitration. He would patiently listen to them and effect reconciliation among the contending parties.

A monkey-chief once bit an infant monkey which fainted. Taking it to be dead the monkey group left it there and went away. A little later the infant regained consciousness and made its way to Bhagavan's *ashram*. As it was limping, the *ashramites* referred to it as Nondi (the Lame one). Nondi was nursed back to normalcy. On one occasion the group of monkeys to which Nondi belonged passed by the *ashram* and took him back into their group. This was unusual because monkeys generally avoid anyone of their clan who had contact with human beings. Nondi

was a frequent visitor to the *ashram* and he would take quite a few liberties with Bhagavan. Nondi was quick to take offence; he was meticulously clean in his ways. Once, when Nondi spilled some rice on the ground the Maharshi scolded him. Immediately Nondi slapped him near the eye. As a punishment, the Maharshi became very cold towards Nondi for some days. But Nondi pleaded with him and found his way back to the Maharshi's lap.

On an earlier occasion also Nondi had misbehaved. The Maharshi was once blowing hot milk to be given to Nondi but the latter thought that the Maharshi was going to sip the milk and slapped him. Soon after realising his mistake Nondi repented and got back into Bhagavan's good books. On that occasion Bhagavan was not hurt badly and that helped Nondi's quick rehabilitation. Making fun of Nondi, Bhagavan once said to him "You should not forget us when you become the Chief." By a strange coincidence Nondi did become the Chief of their group bypassing three senior members. Nondi was keen on being anointed in Bhagavan's presence and went to the *ashram* with his retinue but not finding him there spoilt all the trees of the *ashram*.

On his return, the Maharshi noticed the havoc and wondered why Nondi and his gang did what they had done. The next day Nondi visited the *ashram* but instead of climbing on to the lap of Bhagavan, as he usually did, climbed up a tree and shook a branch – a privilege enjoyed only by a Chief of a group. On seeing that, the Maharshi guessed that Nondi had become a Chief. After that Nondi

came down and sat on the Maharshi's lap. Thereafter Nondi's predecessor in office came up and paid homage to Nondi. This confirmed Bhagavan's guess. At mealtime Nondi sat beside Bhagavan but refused to touch the food and walked away. Surprised at this, the Maharshi followed him. Nondi went and sat among his subjects, with his queens sitting closeby. (Among monkeys the queens of the previous king continued to retain their status even under the new regime). It became clear that Nondi would not partake of any meal without his subjects also being served. So, the *ashramites,* arranged a 'royal banquet' for Nondi.

A little later due to the machinations of his minister Nondi lost his position and began living apart from his group with his progeny. Two months after the Maharshi left Skandasramam and settled down at Ramanasramam, Nondi came searching for him and continued to visit him every fortnight.

Once, an old monkey-chief became sick. He left his group and stood outside the Virupaksha cave. On coming to know this the Maharshi went out to look him up. He also noticed that two previous Chiefs who were expelled by that monkey were on two nearby branches grieving for their erstwhile Chief. The Maharshi took the sick one inside the *ashram* and nursed him but to no avail. While the old monkey was about to die the other two let out a cry of agony. The Maharshi arranged for the burial of the dead monkey with all honours due to a *sannyasin.*

It is said that monkeys have little gratitude. But the experience of the Maharshi was different as may be seen

from this incident: The Maharshi and his disciples set out on *giripradakshina* on a hot day. By the time they reached the vicinity of Pachaiamman Kovil at midday they were tired and thirsty. A group of monkeys who noticed this, climbed on to a nearby tree which bore a number of juicy fruits and shook the branches. As a result, a number of fruits fell on the ground. The group of monkeys left the spot leaving the Maharshi and his party to enjoy the fruits. Possibly, the group of monkeys had received the Maharshi's hospitality earlier and it was their way of reciprocating.

A tiger frequently visited a waterfall close to the *ashram*. He would usually growl to announce his arrival. The Maharshi would know it to be a friendly growl but his disciples would panic and make all sorts of noises to drive away the tiger.

When Ramana moved to the hill his only human companion was Palaniswami. Some others joined him about whom we have scanty information. Even they served Bhagavan and were suitably rewarded. We shall now turn our attention to them, some of them were animals. According to Bhagavan those animals also were *jivas* who sought refuge in his *ashram* to work off their *karma* and therefore were not inferior to human beings. The Maharshi always would refer to the animals as 'he' or 'she' but never as 'it.' Both humans and animals who stayed with the Maharshi constituted his 'family.' Obviously, therefore, even the Maharshi had 'family responsibilities.' Just as in any family the younger members were particularly taken care of, even in the Maharshi's 'family' the voiceless

members were looked after with great care. The Maharshi took care of the food, bath and bed of these 'children.' Great care was taken if any of these 'children' fell ill. Also, appropriate functions were conducted in connection with the delivery, wedding or funeral of any of the animals.

Family of dogs:

Kamala was the founder of the family of dogs, a family which was fairly large. The Maharshi knew the members of the different generations and each one of them bore a name. For facility we shall refer to them as 1, 2, 3 etc. The descendants of Kamala included Neela, Jack and Rose. A little before Kamala's end Bhagavan asked Rose to go and look her up. After Kamala passed away he consoled Rose.

Chinna Karuppan: This dog was dark-skinned and came to be known as the Dark one (Karuppan), Karuppan was very fastidious. He would generally keep aloof and not mix with other dogs. He would stay close to the Virupaksha cave amidst bushes. Noticing his aloofness the *ashramites* would serve him his food at a short distance from him. However, one day as the Maharshi was on his way to Skandasramam, Karuppan leapt up and wound himself round the Maharshi's feet and played with great joy. Thenceforth he became a member of the *ashram.*

Karuppan was intelligent, large-hearted and sensitive. At the *ashram* he mixed freely with the other members and played about with them. He even tried to play with those who were orthodox and resented any dog.

On one occasion, Karuppan went near a Brahmin, who was performing *japa,* little knowing that it was

prohibited. The disturbed Brahmin hit the dog with a stick. After that incident Karuppan never again stepped into the *ashram.* Extremely sensitive as he was, Karuppan disappeared altogether from the sight of those who slighted him.

On an earlier occasion, a similar incident had occurred. On a rainy night, Palaniswami was rude towards Karuppan who at once left the place and lay on a bag of coals at Skandasramam. He did not return to the Virupaksha cave till he was specially invited.

Palaniswami also scolded a pup once who thereupon jumped into a water tank and killed himself. On that very day, Bhagavan had told his disciples that those animals came to live with him to work off their *karma* and that they should be respected. Yet sometimes his disciples did not follow his precept and were insensitive.

On several occasions, the dogs Kamala and Seguppan were ordered by Bhagavan to take new visitors to different shrines and *teerthas,* which they did.

Jack 1: This dog was both intelligent and obedient. Once the Maharshi set out on *giripradakshina* with his disciples by a short-route across the hill. He asked Jack1 to go down the hill to the town. Accordingly, Jack left and was sighted by the Maharshi on its way down. Midway on their walk the Maharshi changed course and walked down the hill. As they were descending, Jack was returning from the town. The Maharshi then directed Jack to go back to the *ashram.* Though reluctant to leave Bhagavan's company, as an obedient fellow, Jack went back to the *ashram.* Jack was soft and austere in his ways. His daily routine was like

this: early in the morning he would visit a *devadasi's* (temple dancer's) house for breakfast and then go to a priest's house to accompany him to the shrine at Guha Namassivaya. After that he would go to Virupaksha cave for Bhagavan's *darshan* and later to a resting place nearby. Around 9.30 in the morning he would visit the shrine at Guha Namassivaya for *prasadam* and get back to his place of rest. Again by evening he would visit the *devadasi's* house for food. After supper he would go to a *math* to keep company with the priest. To the extent possible he would spend his time in the vicinity of Arunachaleswara, much like a *yogi.*

In 1905 - 1906 when the plague broke out in the town most of the inhabitants of Tiruvannamalai left the place leaving it deserted. Leopards roamed about the streets during daytime. Bhagavan and some of his disciples stayed, at Pachaiamman Kovil during that period. Jack did not stay with Bhagavan but stayed with the priest at Guha Namassivaya. After sometime he left the place never to be seen again.

The Maharshi looked upon the animals as *sadhus.* He ensured that they had their share of food before others in the *ashram* did. The Maharshi arranged for the proper burial of the *ashram* animals upon their death and in some cases erected *samadhis.*

Human Companions:

(1) Palaniswami: The devotion of Palaniswami has already been recounted. The Maharshi had great affection for this elderly attendant of his. For Palani life without Bhagavan was meaningless. He breathed his last when he

was about sixty in 1918 during the period when Bhagvan stayed at Virupaksha cave.

(2) The 'old lady of greens' (Keerai Patti): Ramana went to live on the hill in 1900. An old lady who lived at a corner of Guha Namassivaya shrine used to collect greens and cook them. One day she brought some greens for the Swami, the new arrival on the hill. The Swami partook of it and ever since the old lady began regularly serving the Swami. He also was a frequent visitor to her place. Not only that, he would, on occasion, help the lady in collecting greens and in getting them ready for cooking. The old lady had great mother-like affection for the young Swami. Devotees of Bhagavan believed that the old lady was reborn as the Cow Lakshmi who stayed at Ramanasramam. Bhagavan also appeared to subscribe to that view as may be seen from this: A devotee once asked Bhagavan whether it was possible for a human being to be re-born as an animal. Bhagavan's reply was, "Why not? Do we not have Lakshmi?"

3) Ayyaswami: Ayyaswami was a Malayalee who was endowed with great detachment like Uddandi Nayanar. For sheer service-mindedness he was unequalled. He looked after the upkeep of the *ashram.* He would be busy throughout the day and quietly go out into the town begging without anybody noticing him. This serviceable member of the *ashram* passed away quite young, in the same year as Keerai Patti.

29. Giripradakshina

"Whatever a great man does is followed by others"
– *Bhagavad Gita*.

IN 1908, Seshadri Swami paid a visit to the Maharshi who was then staying at the Mango tree cave. He spent some time closely observing the Maharshi with a view to reading his mind. As he could not do so he threw up his hands in exasperation and said that he could not understand what the Maharshi was thinking about. The Maharshi didn't respond. Seshadri continued, "It is enough if one worships Arunachaleswara. He will grant liberation."

Maharshi: Who is it that worships and who is worshipped?

Seshadri broke into a loud laughter and said: "That is not clear; that is the whole problem". Thereupon Bhagavan gave a long discourse on the experience of *advaita* which Seshadri listened to very attentively. At the end he said, "I am not able to say anything, all of this is unintelligible to me. It is all a blank. As for myself, I am content to be a worshipper always." Later he prostrated to the peak of the hill fifteen times and left the place. Seshadri seemed to prefer worshipping the peak of the hill as being symbolic of Arunachaleswara, the Almighty.

Most people had a similar opinion. For them, the hill was the form of Arunachaleswara, the column of light. The recollection of the very name "Arunachala" or a *darshan* of the hill would erase all attachments.

A column of light is raised at the Arunachaleswara temple on every *Krittikai* day to reiterate that the hill represents the *Jyotirlinga*. This column is raised at the very moment that a light is lit on the peak of the hill. The latter is fed by camphor, ghee and other materials, and rises up to the skies and remains like that for some days. It is also visible at several distant places. The spreading rays of the light justify the name, Arunachala. That column of light is also symbolic of the light within the cave of the Heart. The *sthala-purana* describes Arunachala as the centre of the world and also as the Kasi of the South.

A *pradakshina* (circumambulation) of the hill is deemed to be the equivalent of visiting all the pilgrim centres of the land. It also symbolizes a *pradakshina* of Parameswara himself. According to legend, Vinayaka beat Kumaraswamy by the simple device of circumambulation of Easwara, such is the power of *giripradakshina*. Its importance for the devotees cannot be overemphasized. The Maharshi also performed it not for his own benefit but in order to set an example to his devotees and disciples.

There is a well-laid road round the hill along which shrines, tanks, *mantaps* and *samadhis* abound. The road is also lined by huge trees providing shade to the passersby. There are also resting places along the road.

Everyone carries out the *pradakshina* in his or her own way. Some simply walk, some others roll along the road, yet others halt after every step and undertake an *atma-pradakshina* at each halt or prostrate to the hill. Generally the *pradakshina* is completed in three hours.

Ever since he reached Arunachala and till about 1926 the Maharshi used to do the *pradakshina* regularly at least once a week or even more frequently. Usually, if he set out in the morning he would return to the *ashram* by nightfall. Similarly, if he started in the evening he would return by day-break. Occasionally, the *pradakshina* might take two or three days. The Maharshi would walk very slowly as laid down in the scriptures and would be in a state of *samadhi* most of the time--the body would move mechanically. The Maharshi would also rest a little after every mile. At *mantaps* devotees would stop him and offer food or other refreshments. The devotees would compete with one another in extending their hospitality to Bhagavan, who would oblige all of them.

The behaviour of those who followed Bhagavan varied from person to person. Some were silent, some played musical instruments or sang ecstatically, like *bhajan* groups. Usually knowledgable in music, the devotees had the added impetus provided by *bhakti* and sang excellently bringing pleasure to the listeners.

Gajanana who would accompany Bhagavan would dance all along the way, singing verses from the sacred *Bhagavata.* He would give the impression that Lord Nataraja was accompanying Bhagavan. Some devotees

chanted Bhagavan's 108 names or sang hymns composed by the Maharshi or others. The devotees would feel that the Lord himself was in their midst and so they expressed themselves, without any inhibition.

During the *pradakshina* period the devotees were submerged in an ocean of devotion and were swept away by the cool breeze of *Jnana*. The Maharshi's silence was very deep and one wondered if he could speak at all. But when he spoke, his words were clean crystals of wisdom.

Bhagavan composed several hymns during his several *pradakshinas* and at those times he was in the *akasa* of the interior where lay no mind, no word, no seer, no seen, no worshipper, no worshipped; there was only one-the *Atma*.

30. Natanananda Swami

DESIROUS of self-knowledge and out of a conviction that a householder's life was a hindrance to it several people leave their homes seeking a *guru's* grace . Yet destiny being insurmountable and possibly because going through the householder's stage was necessary in their cases, either because of their past *karma* or their being not fully ready, they have to continue playing the householder's part. This observation is very much in evidence in the case of Natesa Mudaliar.

Natesa Mudaliar was a teacher in an elementary school. A little after he setup his home, he chanced upon the book, '*Jnanatirattu*', a Tamil version of Swami Vivekananda's '*Jnanayoga*'. That book fired Mudaliar with *vairagya* at a time when he had just commenced his conjugal life. He then thought that 'self knowledge' was impossible without a *guru* and began an earnest search for one.

Someone told him about the Maharshi but also cautioned him that the Maharshi would not give any *upadesa* to anyone and therefore his becoming a *guru* was impossible. Yet Mudaliar visited Skandasramam in 1918 and sat in the Maharshi's presence for several hours but could not muster enough courage to broach the subject nor did the Maharshi speak to him. Mudali was convinced

that it would be impossible to become a disciple of the Maharshi and so returned home disappointed. But he did not leave his search. He thought of several other well known *sadhus* but in no case did he feel attracted.

He despaired of attaining *mukti*. Keeping in view that one who died at Kasi would attain *mukt*i, he set out on a journey to that holy place accompanied by a friend. At Sri Perumbudur another devotee, a bachelor, became his acquaintance. The devotee admonished Mudali for deserting his young wife who had left her parental home to live with him. Thus he persuaded Mudaliar to return home.

Two more attempts of Mudaliar to go to Kasi did not succeed for some other reasons. In 1920, Mudaliar wrote a letter to the Maharshi saying " I had the privilege of having your *darshan* sometime back, but you have not showered your grace on this unfortunate one. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa invited one and all to share the sweetness of the bliss enjoyed by him. You have attained *mukti*, Sir, but is it fair to leave the likes of me who are caught in the wild fire of *samsara* to our fate? I beg of you to let me know through a letter if I can come to your presence. I shall be there at once."

A month passed by but there was no reply. Then Mudaliar sent another letter by registered post in which he said: "I am convinced that you are my refuge if not in this birth in a subsequent one. I am determined to have you as my *guru* if not now, subsequently. You will have to be born again for my sake."

A few days later the Maharshi appeared in Mudaliar's dream, in which he said to him: "What is the use of your meditating on me? Meditate on Easwara who is mounted on the bull, Nandi. Once you get his grace my help will follow." Then onwards, Mudaliar commenced the prescribed meditation. Meanwhile he got a letter from an inmate of Bhagavan's *ashram*, Vasudeva Sastry, saying " Both of your letters have reached us. Bhagavan never gives a reply to letters. You may come and have his *darshan*". After he enquired about Sastry and his relationship with the Maharshi, Mudaliar went to Arunachala, He first had the *darshan* of Arunachaleshwara and spent that night in the temple precincts.

A Brahmin saw Mudaliar and after finding out the purpose of his visit said "It is fine that you have come, but let me tell you my experience. For over sixteen years I have been yearning for the Maharshi's grace but with no luck. I am doubtful if your experience will be any better. He is completely indifferent and never says anything. He is not at all moved by visitors. Your going there is a sheer waste". Mudaliar did not like this, but the Brahmin persisted saying, "But there is a *Mahatma* by name Seshadri Swami close by. He also does not allow anyone to come near him and flings stones at them. Yet you may go and try your luck with him. If he responds kindly, you have a chance". Mudaliar agreed to this course of action.

But to locate Seshadri Swami was not at all easy. Mudaliar and his companion J.V. Subrahmanyan Iyer, a teacher, began the search. As midday had approached

Mudaliar felt the heat of the outside sun as well as the heat of his interior, which was one of doubt. Iyer asked Mudaliar to wait at a particular place and went by himself to look for Seshadri. After sometime he came back to Mudaliar, accompanied by Seshadri Swami, on seeing whom Mudaliar felt it was a good augury.

All on a sudden Seshadri asked Mudaliar "What is that you can give me?" Mudaliar at once placed in his palms the jack fruit pieces he had. After eating them, Seshadri began walking away towards the market place. Mudaliar and Iyer followed him. "Won't you buy me some mangoes" asked Seshadri. At this, Mudaliar's enthusiasm doubled at the thought that the *Mahatma* was thus giving him an opportunity to serve him. Seshadri ate some mango pieces, and distributed the rest to the people surrounding him and later asked for water. Iyer went out to fetch water.

Seshadri turned towards Mudaliar and said "What a pity! Why suffer like this? After all, what is *jnana*? Whatever remains with you after you mentally reject everything as being impermanent is *jnana*. God is that. It is madness to visit all sorts of hills and caves in the hope of acquiring *jnana*. Have no fear and go". Seshadri turned to go away by which time Iyer brought water. That was on 2nd May 1920.

Taking this to be a harbinger of good things to come Mudaliar and Iyer left for the hill that very afternoon in the hot sun. They sat in the presence of the Maharshi for well over five hours, but he did not utter a single word. Dinner time was nearing and Bhagavan was getting ready to leave.

At that time Iyer pointed out to Mudaliar and said to the Maharshi. "This is the person who wrote two letters". The Maharshi looked at Mudaliar a couple of times but said nothing and left the place. Mudaliar went back.

Thereafter Mudaliar kept visiting the *ashram* every month. Though he watched several visitors plying the Maharshi with questions he could not bring himself to ask even a single question.

A year passed this way. During one of these visits, Mudaliar asked Bhagavan "People speak variously about Bhagavan's grace. I would like to experience what it is really like." Bhagavan replied "I have always been giving you grace if you do not understand it what can I do?" Mudaliar interpreted this as an indication that Bhagavan's being in silent *Samadhi* was in itself his grace towards people and that for seekers the ideal was to attain a state of *mouna*. But that state of *mouna* was not clear to him yet. Some instructed that the mind should concentrate on one matter but as this was contrary to what Tayumanuvar said, namely, that "there should be no ideal in *dhyana*, the mind itself should vanish" those instructions did not appeal to Mudaliar.

A few days later Mudaliar had another dream in which the Maharshi gave him this *upadesa*: "Just as both the eyes look at the same object, keep your attention fixed on one thing only. Do not let your attention shift to any other external or internal matter". Mudaliar assumed that the Maharshi was talking about the physical eyes and said to him: "This does not appear to be the correct path. If you

also say so, then to whom should I turn for guidance?" The Maharshi replied, "What I told you is correct, I promise. Your doubt is not misplaced but try this method for a few days, you will experience the *atma*". So Mudaliar followed the instructions for sometime. Here is what Mudaliar said about his further experience:

> I had a dream where both my father and the Maharshi figured. Pointing out my father the Maharshi asked me who he was. I replied hesitatingly "My father" though I was conscious that I was not speaking of the true nature of the relationship. Maharshi smiled approvingly and said "That is true only from a worldly stand point but not from the absolute stand point, isn't it? Didn't I say that I was not the body?" Saying this, the Maharshi drew me close to him and placed his hand on my head and later he pressed on the right side of my heart with a finger. It pained a little but I bore it as his grace.

Though not immediately, Mudaliar realised later that the Maharshi wanted him to discard the body-consciousness and that his touch on his head and heart were *hasta diksha* (initiation through touch by hand.)

On one occasion, while he sat in the presence of the Maharshi several learned scholars were conversing with him. They were discussing some matters in Tamil, a language he was familiar with but what they were discussing was incomprehensible to Mudaliar. He therefore felt sorry within and thought "I don't think I will ever get to be so knowledgeable, I hope I will do so at

least in my next birth". The Maharshi observed him and after the visitors left said to him: "Why are you so sorry? What you wish to obtain is with you already. Will anyone ask for something already available? Even if you feel that it was not clear to you now, won't it be so a little later? Why be depressed about such a minor matter? If really you do not deserve to learn it, how come you have this desire to have the *darshan* of *Mahatmas*?" With this Mudaliar felt a little relieved.

Mudaliar was convinced that his life as a householder was a hindrance for his spiritual advancement and so in 1926 sought Bhagavan's permission to take to *sannyasa* (Renunciation). The Maharshi dissuaded him saying that any number of impediments could arise even in a forest and that just as he would not think of family responsibilities in an *ashram* he should live without any thought of them in the house also. The Maharshi similarly dissuaded him on two more occasions.

It was not that the Maharshi was unaware of Mudaliar's ardent wish, so he appeared to Mudaliar's wife and brother in dreams and told them that Mudaliar had his grace and that the family members must help him achieve his objective. They also fell in line. As a first step, Mudaliar gave up his job, he stayed at Arunachala and in 1929 took to *sannyasa* with the name Natanananda Swami. A few years later, owing to certain developments, he had to resume the householder's role.

Right from his first *darshan* of the Maharshi, Natanananda began composing songs on him. Some of

them are *Ramana Stotra Manjari*, *Ramana Stotra Shodasam*, *Ramana naan manimalai* and *Ramana Sataka*. In all these hymns Natanananda described his questions to the Maharshi and the latter's replies. He used also to compose Bhagavan's answers to questions of other disciples and show them to Bhagvan concurrently. This compilation was published as *Upadesa Manjari*.

31. Alagamma

A little after Alagamma left the Maharshi at Pavalakundru her son Nagaswami who was then in his prime passed away in 1900, leaving behind a childless widow. Alagamma's grief was immense - by then she had lost her husband and eldest son ; her second son was a *sannyasi* and her third son was barely fourteen. Yet he took on the family responsibility and joined the Tiruvengadu temple as a clerk. In 1902 he visited his brother at Arunachala and on seeing him broke down. But the elder one was as usual unmoved. Alagamma depended on her husband's brother Nelliappa Iyer for sustenance.

She had a painful time and spent most of her time reciting *vedantic* songs. Like several ladies of her time she was able to sing well though she was not formally trained to do so. She made it a point to learn the import of great *vedantic* sayings, the *mahavakyas,* from an elderly lady, Tulasi. Thus she consoled herself and was peaceful.

In 1913, she went on a pilgrimage to Kasi and on her way back halted at Arunachala.

A little later Nagasundaram got married and set up house. Alagamma stayed with him. The family finances were none too comfortable; the house at Tiruchuzhi had to be sold in 1900 to clear debts. Nelliappa Iyer passed

away in 1914. In the same year Alagamma once again went on a pilgrimage. This time it was to Tirupati. On her way back she visited her son at Arunachala, who was then staying at the Virupaksha cave.

During her brief stay Alagamma had an attack of typhoid. The Maharshi who was quite indifferent about his own body took great care in nursing his mother. In fact he did so even when his disciples or visitors fell ill.

Alagamma had high temperature and therefore had delirium. Thereupon the Maharshi composed four verses addressing Arunachala . These were the verses:

1. Hill of my refuge that cures the ills of recurring births! Oh Lord! It is for thee to cure my mother's fever.

2. Oh God that smitest Death itself ! My sole refuge! Vouchsafe Thy grace unto my mother and shield her from Death! What is Death if scrutinised?

3. Arunachala! Thou blazing fire of *Jnana*! Deign to wrap my mother in Thy light and make her one with Thee. What need then for cremation?

4. Arunachala! That chasest away illusion (*Maya*)! Why delayest Thou to dispel my mother's delirium? Besides Thee is there anyone who with maternal solicitude can protect the suppliant soul and ward off the strokes of destiny?

– Translation: *Collected Works*

As the Maharshi said, how could Alagamma who was destined to be merged in the fire of *Jnana,* be cremated?

The fever subsided. As she did not like the idea of being a burden on the *ashram* Alagamma returned to Manamadurai. In 1915, Nagasundaram's wife

Mangalammal, passed away suddenly leaving behind her only son, an infant, Venkataraman. The baby's care became a problem. Initially Nelliappa Iyer's wife undertook the responsibility but as she was also getting on in years, Nagasundaram left the boy in the care of his sister, Alamelu.

Staying at home became unbearable for Alagamma. She looked around but could discern nobody other than her second son, the Maharshi, with whom she could stay. In fact it was he who could be her saviour both in the here and the hereafter. Alagamma left for Arunachala (1916) and initially stayed with Echammal. But she wanted to stay at the *ashram* with her son. But the *ashram* was too small to accommodate her also. Besides, some of the Maharshi's disciples such as Gambhiram Seshayya felt that if the Maharshi were to have the company of his close relatives he might again leave everybody and go away from Arunachala itself; hence they objected to the mother's stay at the *ashram.* As she could find no other alternative Alagamma returned home to pursue her *abhyasa* of *yoga.* Yet she was not quite happy.

A little later she again went on a pilgrimage to Tirupati, accompanied by Nagasundaram and his baby son. On their way back they halted at Arunachala and this time Alagamma decided to stay back at the *ashram.* The disciples of the Maharshi also relented.

A little after the arrival of the mother at the *ashram* the Skandasramam got ready and the Maharshi moved there. Alagamma followed him. Nagasundaram and his son returned to Tiruvengadu.

Nagasundaram had his share of difficulties right from his young days. He had suffered from a host of ailments in his childhood. To cap all his other difficulties he had the huge burden of debt. Unable to bring up his son he left him elsewhere.

During that period Narayana Reddy of Arunachala visited him and conveyed to him the desire of Alagamma that both her sons should be by her side. Hence Nagasundaram left for Arunachala but as he was aware that his brother, the Maharshi, was not particularly attached to anybody Nagasundaram stayed with Gambhiram Seshayya for sometime and kept visiting the Maharshi like any other devotee.

In 1918, Nagasundaram took to *sannyasa* and donned the ochre robes. As a renunciate he took the name Niranjanananda. He would beg for his food in the town, a practice which the Maharshi's disciples did not appreciate. After all, while they were all partaking of the food offered to Bhagavan by his devotees it was incongruous that the Maharshi's brother should go out abegging. Meanwhile, Alagamma organised a kitchen at the *ashram.* The young *sannayasi,* Niranjanananda, did not have to go out seeking alms thereafter.

In this manner the Maharshi became some kind of a householder. His disciples constituted his family, his close relatives were with him and a permanent residence where food was cooked had sprung up.

It is appropriate to recall here what Seshadri Swami said to a devotee of his who sought his permission to go

up the hill (to have Bhagavan's *darshan*). Seshadri laughed and said, "Go, by all means go. You have a householder there, he will give you sweets also". This statement was pregnant both with a practical (v*yavaharika*) and absolute (*paramarthika*) meaning.

32. The Mother's *Nirvana*

"May you have a permanent residence in that world where all treasures, happiness and pleasures abound!"
– Bhavabhuti.

ALAGAMMA'S spiritual training had commenced. It was as if the Maharshi intended to provide eternal life for her who had provided him with physical life. But for a liberated state to arise it was essential that all latent tendencies should vanish. Alagamma had some orthodox observances like untouchability and *madi*. The observances were of minor importance but attaching any significance to them only made them hindrances to spiritual progress. At the *ashram* there were no caste distinctions, all were welcome. In order to ensure that she no longer clung to several orthodox observances the Maharshi would make fun of her on every possible occasion. For instance, orthodox women did not partake of anything which contained onion. So, the Maharshi would point at some onions in the *ashram* and joke that they or a drumstick, which was also taboo, could block her way to heaven. He would also tell her that the observances had a limited purpose and that religion was not confined only to these

regulations. The mother gradually got reconciled to the situation and thought that one should be satisfied with what was available. Even if she was not able to observe her orthodox ways she realised that the Maharshi's greatness would take care of her transgressions, if any.

Another latent tendency of hers was her strong attachment to the Maharshi, her son. She loved him and expected him to love her equally strongly. This bond could not be swept away, though it needed to be swept away . Whenever she demonstrated her love through any act the Maharshi admonished her. On several occasions he pulled her up, upon which she wept. The Maharshi would then say "Cry and cry more. It does you good. The more you cry the more satisfied am I". She could not understand why he was so harsh towards her. On some other occasions he would not give her any reply but would converse with other ladies, which hurt her. She felt that he slighted her deliberately. All that he would say was: " All women are my mothers, what is so special about you?" Apart from this, the Maharshi who always helped in household chores, intentionally refused to help his mother whenever she sought it. Once, she asked him to help her in preparing *appalams*. Instead of doing so, he gave her a song – famous as the "*appalam* song". The song goes like this:

> Try and make some *appalams.*
> Eat them and your longing satisfy.
> Don't roam the world disconsolate.
> Heed the word, unique, unspoken

Taught by the teacher true who teaches
The truth of Being -Awareness-Bliss
Try and make some... satisfy

1. Take the black-gram, Ego-self,
Growing in the fivefold body field
And grind it in the quern,
The wisdom - quest of "Who am I?"
Reducing it to finest flour
Try and make some... satisfy.

2. Mix it with *pirandai* - juice,
Which is holy company,
Add mind-control, the cummin seed,
The pepper of self - restraint,
The salt of non-attachment,
And asafoetida , the aroma
Of virtuous inclination.
Try and make some... satisfy.

3. In the heart mortar place the dough.
And with mind -pestle inward turned,
Pound it hard with the strokes of 'I' 'I',
Then flatten it with the rolling - pin
Of stillness on the level slab (of Being)
Work away, untiring, steady, cheerful
Try and make some... satisfy.

4. Put the *appalam* in the ghee of Brahman
Held in the pan of infinite silence
And fry it over the fire of knowledge.
Now as I transmuted into That,

Eat and taste the Self as Self,
Abiding as the Self alone.
Try and make some... satisfy.

– Tr. K. Swaminathan

Alagamma could not appreciate this type of a behaviour nor did she think it appropriate.

In course of time she came to understand the Maharshi's behaviour and grasped that attachment was not proper. She realised that she had come to the *ashram* not as the Maharshi's mother but as a devotee keen on attaining spiritual knowledge. There was only one way by which she could win his grace and that was by service without any desire, but with contentment and detachment. With this realisation her old body toiled day and night to serve the *ashram* inmates. Finally she donned ochre robes, gained detachment and listened to Vedantic matters. She surrendered herself to the Maharshi, certain in the belief that he was her saviour.

In the last two or three months of her physical life she was sick, hence it had become necessary for someone to look after her. The Maharshi was her first servant. He nursed her day and night but how long could that old and tired body survive?

May 19, 1922 (*Dundubhi* year and *Vaisakha* month) was her last day; everyone could sense the impending end that day. Yet they had to do whatever was possible in a spirit of detachment leaving the result to the Lord. As long as she was conscious, Bhagavan gave her spiritual instructions. When she lost consciousness Ganapati Muni

and others commenced *vedic* chants, some others chanted the Rama-*nama*.

After the violent gasps (*urdhva-swasa*) began, Bhagavan placed his right hand on her heaving heart and the left one on her head. He looked at her intently. The day passed that way. Subsequently Bhagavan himself narrated what had happened thus:

> The latent tendencies and thoughts which are the cause of future births flared up. She had just then lost consciousness of the external world. Hence in the subtle world her subtle body was witnessing scene after scene of what was to happen. By this sequence of experiences, the soul went through the future births and travelled towards the highest.

How could she experience this? It was because of the current of Bhagavan's spiritual power transmitted by touch that she experienced all within herself, without having to be born over and over again. There was a battle between her soul forces and Bhagavan's spiritual power in which her latent tendencies gradually weakened and ultimately got vanquished. Bhagavan actually described the scenes she witnessed in the subtle state including their intensity.

The end came peacefully by eight in the night. Among those present, Ganapati and Niranjanananda Swami heard a sound indicative of the mother's death.

In this manner, the mother's individuality submerged in *Atma*, God. She attained *mahanirvana.* She had no more births. Due to her son, who was Arunachala in human form, she attained *mukti* or became established in the *Atma.*

As the mother's end was nearing nobody in the *ashram* ate anything that day. After her end, the Maharshi got up, and with no trace of grief said, "We may now eat. There is no pollution." How could there be any pollution when they were in the presence of the Lord in whom the holy lady merged? Such a body was a holy shrine in itself. The *ashramites* had a quiet meal.

The entire night passed in the singing of devotional songs. According to Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer, "Bhagavan had no grief whatever. On the other hand, he appeared to be relieved like a bird released from a cage." These words were recorded in his diary. True, why did he have to grieve?

The mother attained the supreme state. Some days after the event somebody remarked to the Maharshi, "Mother has passed away." Immediately Bhagavan corrected him saying "No, mother has merged, she has become one." On another occasion, when the matter of his according *mukti* to the mother came up, Bhagavan said, "Yes my attempt in her case was successful. Earlier, in the case of Palaniswami I attempted the same. Thinking that he had attained the ultimate I removed my hand, thereupon he opened his eyes. The *prana* passed through the eyes. That is how my attempt at that time failed." On still another occasion, Bhagavan said, "Where has mother gone? She is here." Hence there need be no doubt as to where Alagammal had departed. The Maharashi meant that she merged in Easwara and was with him (as he also was abiding in the *atma*).

The question as to whether the body was to be cremated or buried came up on the very night of mother's expiry. Bhagavan pointed out that according to chapter 13 of *Ramana Gita* the body of one who attained *mukti* was to be buried and not cremated. The disciples decided to bury the body. Early next dawn, they carried the body from Skandasramam down the hill to a spot near Paliteertham. Meanwhile, some relatives from other places came and though they argued in favour of a cremation, they were overruled. The news of the mother's death passed round the town, in spite of every effort to keep it private. As a result, numerous people turned up at the burial ground.

A pit was dug below an *aswatha* tree. The body was lowered into it. The pit was filled with camphor, *vibhuti*, salt and other aromatic materials and later covered. The disciples erected a brick *samadhi* and by some coincidence, a Siva *linga* from Kasi arrived just then. It was placed atop the *samadhi* and named, Matrubhuteswara (Mother who was Easwara).

The Swami was watching the proceedings as a mere witness. With the *samadhi* of the mother the son's filial duty ended.

As Swami had entreated Arunachala in 1914, the mother was consumed not by the fire of cremation but by the fire of *Jnana* .

For the *Mahapooja* day, Ganapati Muni wrote six verses entitled *Soundaryamba shatkam* (Six verses on Soundaryamba) – (Soundaryamba has the same meaning as Alagamma). This is the substance of the verses:

1. In the first quarter of the night of Friday, the ninth day of the dark fortnight of *Vaisakha* month, *Dundubhi* year

2. Wife of Sundaram born in the exalted lineage of Bharadwaja, Parasara and mother of Ramana Maharshi born as an *avatara* of Guruguha (Subrahmanya), the blessed lady,

3. One devoid of any attachment, one cleansed by *bhakti* to Siva, one whose *prana* was arrested by the touch of Guha (Ramana Maharshi), one whose tendencies were all destroyed that very moment

4. She, Soundaryamba, became that Light which can be known only by the Vedantic *Vakyas*, which is all-pervasive, and which was known by her son.

5. At that *samadhi* of Soundaryamba the stream which poured out of the lotus palms of Ramana Maharshi became a new *teertha*, the *Aghasamana teertha* (the *teertha* which removes all sins).

6. Glory to the holy mother of sacred Ramana!
Glory to the *samadhi*!
Glory to the *linga* consecrated by the Maharshi!
Glory to the new *Aghasamana teertha*!

The Maharshi later said something interesting. After her passing away, Alagammal's body acquired a new brilliance which persisted till the *abbisheka* on the following day at the time of *samadhi*; it disappeared soon after water was poured. Further, at the last breath in all cases a faint sound emanates. In the mother's case, Bhagavan did not notice it but others present did.

Every year, to commemorate the anniversary, *pooja* is performed to Matrubhuteswara. Thousands of devotees

from various parts of the world assemble to join the observance.

With this chapter, that part of the book dealing with the Maharshi's life on the hill comes to an end. The Maharshi had numerous disciples but brief stories of only some of them who had significance from the writer's standpoint and who might serve as examples to us, have been described here. Palani was an innocent *bhakta*, Ganapati was a scholar par-excellence with great prescience, Lakshmi Ammal was a pious lady who got out of that torment of *samsara*, Ramaswamy Iyer was beset by illness, Natanananda simply had the *samskara* of the East, Sivaprakasam had the *samskara* of the West, Seshayya was balanced. Speaking of different paths, Lakshmi Ammal had reached the stage of attaining *samadhi* through *ashtanga yoga* by the time she reached Bhagavan, Seshayya was a votary of *Ramanama*, *pranayama* and was also interested in *yoga,* Ganapati was a master at *mantra japa*, Sivaprakasam was a logician totally, Ramaswamy Iyer had no specialisation, Humphreys belonged to the *siddha* school, Natanananda was simply a believer. To grant spiritual benefit to such diverse persons by making them focus on a single subject is a matter of profound grace.

In the remaining chapters of this book, Sri Bhagavan's life at the *Ashram* nestling at the foot of the hill, Arunachala, will be described.

33. Establishment of Sri Ramanasramam

FOR some days after Alagamma's *samadhi* people stayed close by. They had to fetch water from Paliteertham with great difficulty. Observing this, Bhagavan dug into the soil at a moist place and there was a spring. A larger pit was dug and enough water was obtained . This came to be known as Ramanateertham or *aghasamanam.*

Daily *pooja* had to be performed for the Matrubhuteswara *linga.* The *samadhi* was in the midst of a graveyard and close to a forest where leopards roamed about in the night. After the first ten days it was difficult to find anyone to stay at the *samadhi.* Therefore, Niranjanananda Swami would come down from Skandasramam every day to perform *pooja*. In course of time he also found this to be difficult. A few days later he erected a thatched roof over the *samadhi* and began staying there, Dandapaniswami joined him after a few months. He was energetic enough to collect funds to get part of the forest cleared and the ground levelled. The Maharshi also would visit the place every day. Meanwhile, the *jayanti* of Bhagavan neared. Dandapani wished to celebrate the *jayanti* at the *samadhi.* A week before the *jayanti* Bhagavan visited the *samadhi* and stayed back. Nobody knew the reason for it, though a

few speculated that it was for the convenience of the visitors who found it difficult to visit him and serve him atop the hill. But the real reason was quite different. Bhagavan himself said that one morning when he came out of Skandasramam some irresistible power dragged him down and that he came down even forgetting for the moment that back at Skandasramam the *ashramites* would be waiting for him at meal time. "Did I come here of my own volition? Not at all, it was due to the will of something else," said Bhagavan. Earlier, the power of Arunachala drew him to this place, now the power of Amba residing in Matrubhuteswara must have done similarly.

Quite surprisingly, from that day on, the influence of that *sakti* became manifest in all activities. It was as if in the presence of Bhagavan that power acted just as *prakriti* would in the presence of *purusha*! Its first job was to transform the face of the *Ashram* itself.

To start with, there was only one hut at the *samadhi* but in 1924 two huts, one opposite the *samadhi* and the other to the north of that got erected. For bathing, the waters of Paliteertham and for *pooja* the waters of Ramanateertham were used. As for food, several devotees from the town came with offerings; in addition, some vessels were also donated to enable the *Ashram* to have a kitchen. People also donated money. Books like *Ramana Geeta* were sold at a book shop called *Ramaneeya Granthalaya* and the proceeds given to the *Ashram.* Dandapani and others utilised that money for buying vessels and food articles. No money could be saved.

With all this, the *Ashram* did face difficulties. On any given day at least ten persons dined there. This practice gave ideas to a group of robbers. They thought that the *Ashram* was affluent; so on the night of June 26, 1924 they came for a robbery. Earlier also some robbers had entered the *pooja* room and decamped with whatever they could lay their hands on. But the present gang was made of sterner stuff.

The Swami was resting in the hut opposite the *samadhi* and a few disciples rested near the windows of the hut. On hearing some noise, Kunjuswami and Mastan resting near the window woke up. They heard voices outside saying, "There are six people inside." "Who's, out there?," shouted Mastan. The response was a shattering sound of the window panes. The disciples were terrified and sought the safety of the Swami's proximity and went close to him. The objective of the robbers was to terrify them. The Maharshi was unmoved and unperturbed.

Kunjuswami opened the door in the north and brought RamakrishnaSwami resting in the northern hut for help. With the opening of the doors, the dogs Jack and Karuppan rushed out and began barking . The thieves beat them up. Karuppan, already sick, returned to the hut, Jack ran away somewhere.

Bhagavan and Kunjuswami said to the thieves, " There is nothing much for you to take from here, you may as well come in and take whatever you wish." But the thieves did not want to do so, they began removing a window. Kunjuswami was a youth and was all excitement.

He said that he would go out and beat up the thieves and started to move towards the southern door. Bhagavan prevented him saying, "They are carrying out their *dharma.* Let them do what they please. Our *dharma* is to be tolerant and we should not leave it." Kunju was pacified. The increasing tolerance of the *ashramites* only spurred the thieves into further activity. To create the impression that they had firearms they blasted a fire cracker. The *ashramites* responded, "Do not mind Kunju's words, come in and take whatever you want." On getting to know the name of one of the inmates, the thieves threatened that they would harm Kunju. By then Kunju had left by the northern door to the town to fetch some help.

Ramakrishna said to the thieves, "Why all this fuss? Do come in and take whatever you want." Fools that they were, the thieves said they would set fire to the thatched roof. The Maharshi responded saying that there was no need for any such thing and that he and his disciples would go out of the hut. That was what the thieves wanted and agreed to that proposal. The Maharshi was concerned about Karuppan the dog and directed Ramakrishna to take away the dog to a place of safety, which Ramakrishna did. Before he returned Bhagavan accompanied by Mastan, Thangavelu Pillai and Munuswamy Iyer came out of the northern door. The thieves were there by then and beat up each one of them with sticks as they emerged from the hut. They hurt the Maharshi on the left thigh. To this the Maharshi said "If you are not satisfied, you may strike the other thigh also." The thieves did not

hesitate to do so but meanwhile Ramakrishna returned and warded off the blows with his hands. Slowly, he escorted the Maharshi to the northern hut. All the *ashramites* gathered there. The thieves ordered them to stay there and not stir out. The Swami replied, "The hall is yours now, do whatever you please."

One of the thieves came back and demanded a lantern. At Bhagavan's behest, Ramakrishna provided one. A little later another fellow came and demanded the keys of the cupboard. But Kunju had taken the keys with him already which information was passed on to the thieves. Thereupon they broke open the cupboard. All that they could get were a razor, a few silver *pooja* items, a little rice and six rupees saved by Thangavelu. Naturally the thieves were disappointed and showed it; one of them raised a stick and threatening Bhagavan, said "Where have you kept all your money?" "We are poor *sannyasis,* we survive on what others give us. We never had any money at all," said Bhagavan. However much the thieves pressed, that was the only reply they could get. The thieves left disappointed.

The Swami suggested to Ramakrishna that he should apply an ointment and obtain some relief from the pain. When Ramakrishna asked the Swami what had happened to him, he replied "I have also had the *pooja.*" Ramakrishna then noticed the injury on Bhagavan's thigh. He was enraged, and picking up an iron rod he began going out saying, "I will go there and see what those fellows are upto." Bhagavan grasped his intention and said, "We should not

give up our *sadhu-dharma.* If you go there and hit someone may die in the fracas. People will blame us and rightly too. Those thieves are ignorant and do not know what they are doing whereas we who can discriminate between *dharma* and *adharma* should not leave *dharma.* If by accident, the tongue gets bitten do you remove all the teeth?" So saying Bhagavan pacified Ramakrishna. By about two o'clock the thieves left the *Ashram.*

Thereafter Bhagavan sat with his disciples, in the northern cottage and was discussing peacefully a *Vedantic* subject, as if nothing had happened till then. A little later, Kunju returned accompanied by the village 'Maniam' (administrative official), Ramakrishna Iyer, and two police constables. The police made enquiries about the robbery. Very casually, Bhagavan replied "Some ignorant fools tried to rob the *Ashram* expecting a lot but returned disappointed, empty-handed". The police noted the statement and left. Munuswami, a boy who stayed at the *Ashram* ran behind the police and told them that the thieves beat up Bhagavan. 'Maniam' also gave a statement at the police station. The following morning a group of police officials – the Deputy Superintendent, the Circle Inspector, the Sub Inspector and the Head Constable visited the *Ashram* to make enquires. Bhagavan did not tell anyone about the injuries inflicted on him. Neither then nor ever after did Bhagavan utter a single harsh word about the thieves. He never even recollected it. A few days later the thieves who were criminal tribals were caught along with the stolen articles and were sentenced to imprisonment.

By 1926, a few more constructions took place. Along with this expansion squabbles arose among the disciples as to who should manage the affairs of the *Ashram.* How true it is to say that the desire to exercise power is as strong as the desire to earn money and have possessions. By 1930, a situation arose where nobody bothered about the impending *Jayanthi* of Bhagavan and doubts arose whether the *Ashram* would survive at all. A few disciples gathered and decided that Niranjanananda Swami should be the *sarvadhikari* (Chief Executive). But some others filed a suit in a court against this. To avoid further problems some devotees prevailed upon Bhagavan to execute a power-of-attorney in favour of Niranjanananda Swami and a will specifying how the management of the *Ashram* should be carried on. There was no dearth of people who were keen to cause problems for the *Ashram* even later .

After Niranjanananda Swami became the *sarvadhikari* in 1930, the construction activity in the *Ashram* was spectacular. Several buildings like the office, the book depot, the store room, the dining hall, the guest room, the Veda *pathasala*, and the *goshala* were constructed the last named, largely because of Lakshmi the cow who became a sort of an adopted daughter of the *Ashram.*

As time passed, facilities for visitors and inmates of the *Ashram* were added. Notable among these was the guest house built by the Raja of Morvi across the road opposite the *Ashram.*

Narasimhaswami was one of those who came to pursue his *sadhana.* He built himself a small cottage at a grove, to

the west of the *Ashram* known as Palakothu. At Palakothu there was a perennial spring, the Agastyateertham.

The entire family of Aurobindo Bose of Bangalore was devoted to Bhagavan. They settled down at Arunachala close to the *Ashram*. They acquired a large piece of land, built four cottages and named the compound as Mahasthana. Those cottages were meant chiefly for westeners who were finding it inconvenient to stay at the *Ashram*.

Adjacent to Mahasthana three cottages were put up by McIver. Similarly, other compounds arose like the Chettiar compound and Gounder compound. Thus was formed Ramananagar. Maybe this was decided upon by Bhagavan much earlier.

Both Chadwick an Englishman and Devaraja Mudaliar who were disciples of Bhagavan built rooms for themselves in the *Ashram* compound itself. Adjacent to their rooms Yogi Ramaiah and Subbarama Reddy constructed their rooms. All these four were close to the flower garden lying to the west of the hall where Bhagavan stayed.

A dispensary also had come up to the north east of the flower garden to cater to the medical needs of visitors and *Ashram* inmates. *Ashramites* also spent substantial amounts in renovating Paliteertham and built steps to approach the waters. A library housing numerous volumes in various languages was also established.

Huge sums were needed to build all these. The *ashramites* never sought any donations, also they had no

capital to start with. The amounts given unasked by visitors, and the amounts received by the sales of *Ashram* publications constituted the main sources. There were a number of devotees who served in the *Ashram* expecting no return. Actually, *Ashram* employees were few; the devotees got nothing in return but Bhagavan's grace. Work always would go on from four in the morning to about eleven in the night. With the passage of time, providing food for unexpected guests ceased to be a problem.

34. Followers

As Sri Ramanasramam was taking shape followers of Bhagavan also increased. They also began taking part in the *Ashram* activities.

With the increase in the number of followers and *Ashram* inmates it became necessary to regulate the running of the *Ashram.* As Bhagavan aged his body became easily tired hence it became necessary to regulate the visiting hours. Of course, these regulations were not to the liking of some but, the *Ashram* could not, obviously, be run without any regulations.

Bhagavan would never allow any special treatment for himself. He would first make sure that whatever was served to him was available to all. Not only that, he would severely scold anyone who tried to show any preferential treatment towards him while serving food. He also wished that *ashramites* cultivated *vairagya, bhakti* and *seva* (detachment, devotion and service) completely. He deprecated the tendency to cause inconvenience to devotees in the name of regulations. Here is an instance: westerners found it difficult to squat on the floor. A European lady stretched her legs while sitting in the presence of Bhagavan. The attendants of Bhagavan warned her against that practice. Immediately, Bhagavan who usually stretched his legs, folded them and sat cross-legged

but as he was suffering from rheumatic pains, that posture caused him pain. He felt that the regulations applied to him also. To get Bhagavan to resume his normal posture, the attendant allowed the western lady to sit in any posture convenient to her.

Gradually, the number of animals devoted to Bhagavan decreased with the increase in the number of human devotees. Here is a little about the animals.

LAKSHMI:

The darling of all *ashramites,* Lakshmi the cow was believed to be Keerai-patti reborn. She had a free run of the *Ashram* ground. She would often trample upon vegetable beds and have her fill and if anyone tried to chase her away, the Maharshi would intervene and say, "It was your fault that you did not properly fence off the area. Why blame her?" On such occasions, Lakshmi would walk into the hall and stand close to Bhagavan as if she was innocent. Nobody could do anything about it. Lakshmi was quite intelligent and she was aware of the timings for food and without feeding her first no one else even thought of a meal. During summer, cool water would be specially kept for her. Lakshmi was very fond of fruits and would savour them as the Maharshi fed her with fruits. In turn, she would lick Bhagavan's body with her rough tongue and make it appear red, Bhagavan's patience was truly remarkable. Lakshmi was naughty also and did not hesitate to use the hall as a toilet or to make threatening advances towards new comers. Of course, if they patted or caressed her she would be nice to them.

On festive occasions special care would be given to Lakshmi. She would be bathed and suitably done-up. She would also be decorated with garlands. As if to show her beauty she would immediately run to Bhagavan and stand before him. She would not return to the cowshed without visiting the Maharshi in the evening. Before her departure the Maharshi would feed her bananas.

On some occasions, Lakshmi would stand tear-filled in front of the Maharshi as if some experience of an earlier birth came to her mind. Maharshi would console her on such occasions and thereafter she would slowly move towards the cowshed.

Over the years, Lakshmi delivered calves on the *jayanti* of Maharshi or on the day of his *Janma-Nakshatra* (*Punarvasu*). Her progeny grew up in the *Ashram*.

Lakshmi was very conscious of her importance-she would not touch ordinary bananas if the mountain variety was available.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the cowshed, Lakshmi came a little earlier than the prescribed time and stood before the Maharshi refusing to budge until he rose. The Maharshi rose saying, "She wants to take me to her new house why do you want to send her away?" Lakshmi showed him the way to the cowshed as the *ashramites* watched astonished.

Valli:

This deer was presented to the *Ashram* by a manufacturer of match boxes. The deer also was loved by the *ashramites.* All visitors used to pet her , with the result

that she became completely accustomed to human company. She roamed about so freely that she would mix with the lambs of outsiders and accompany them for grazing. On several occasions the shepherds would bring back the deer to the *Ashram.* Once, she strayed far away when some poachers hurt her . On noticing that the deer belonged to the *Ashram,* someone went to her rescue and brought her back to the *Ashram.* In spite of all the attention bestowed on her, the deer lost her life. The deer was buried on the northern side of the *Ashram*.

JACK:

The manner of Jack's death is interesting. About three weeks prior to the Pongal festival of 1933, Jack fell ill. Even earlier, he refused to take any solid food because of which he was fed on milk. Ever since he became sick, Jack did not leave the presence of Bhagavan. The repulsive smell which is characteristic of a dying dog never emanated from him. Though his death was expected any time, he survived till the festival was over and passed away peacefully. The parallel between Jack's death and that of Bhishma the grand warrior of the Mahabharata was not missed even by Bhagavan who said as much. With the death of Jack, Kamala's progeny came to an end.

SQUIRRELS:

For some time the activities of the squirrels in the *Ashram* were intense. The squirrels would take liberties with Bhagavan like crawling over him. In turn, Bhagavan would feed them with various nuts. One day, a squirrel bit Bhagavan's finger as he had not fed her by then.

Pigeons:

In September 1945, a visitor placed two pigeons on Bhagavan's lap and would not take them back. Bhagavan caressed them affectionately at which both the pigeons closed their eyes and became still as if in *samadhi.*

Leopards:

During the same period another visitor brought two leopard cubs and gave them to Bhagavan. As usual, Bhagavan caressed them and fed them milk. Both the cubs fell into a deep slumber near Bhagavan's sofa. A devotee took a photograph of this.

White Peacock:

Similarly, the white peacock sent by the Maharani of Baroda, became a picturesque addition to the *Ashram*.

From the moment Bhagavan came to the *Ashram,* several people with varied objectives and aspirations visited him. Some visited him wondering if in modern times a *Maharshi* could be found at all, some visited him considering him to be a sacred presence, some others visited him in the hope of getting their desires fulfilled by a mere *darshan*, yet others visited him out of disenchantment with worldly life and sought refuge at his feet. The lives of many got transformed by Bhagavan's *darshan* and they became happy. Such visitors also would extol in various ways Bhagavan's grace towards them. Some wrote hymns either in Tamil or in Telugu in praise of Bhagavan. Among them were Swami Pranavananda, Murugunar and Ramaswamy Iyer. Some composed songs in Sanskrit. Narayanaswamy Iyer compiled Maharshi's talks. Lakshmana Sarma expounded Bhagavan's

philosophy in his *Maha Yoga*. Those who translated Bhagavan's works into other languages and those who spread Bhagavan's glory all over the world were also there.

Sri Yogi Ramaiah:

There is an old saying, "It does not matter even if you are not learned. If you are sincere and devoted in your *sadhana* the results will follow on their own." Sri Rama Yogi's life is an example of this saying. He came from a village, Mopuru, near Nellore. His family was well known for its philanthropic disposition and thirst for knowledge. A peculiar feature of the family was that in each generation only one male child was born and within a short time of its birth the father passed away. The same thing happened in this case also because of which Ramaiah was brought up by his maternal uncle at a neighbouring village.

Young, rich and single, the future *yogi* behaved like a spoilt youth for a short time. At the same time, he had abiding *bhakti* for Lord Rama and always wondered if he could become a devotee like Valmiki or a detached person like Kabir, well known devotees of Lord Rama. He would constantly repeat the name of Sri Rama. As good luck would have it, at an early age a *sadhu* by name Sri Brahmananda Teertha Swami became his *guru* and initiated him in the *Taraka Mantra*. The *guru* directed him to repeat the mantra five thousand times a day, which Ramaiah did. Once, in a fit of detachment, he set out to go to Kasi. The *guru* saw him and asked him whether he had obtained the permission of his mother for the journey. When Ramaiah confessed that he did no such thing the *guru*

advised him to perform his japa in a lonely spot in the garden of their house and thus dissuaded him from undertaking the proposed trip. In addition to *japa* Ramaiah resorted to vegetarian food and *Pranayama,* this last, without anyone's guidance . In a short time he had various spiritual experiences but they soon passed away.

Once, he had a unique experience where everything appeared as a brilliant light. Ramaiah wondered what it was and tried to find out its nature from various people but to no avail. His *guru* also had passed away by then. Remembering the name Arunachala, which he had came across earlier, Ramaiah went there to get his doubt cleared from the Maharshi. Bhagavan explained the phenomenon as a consequence of *samadhi,* to the satisfaction of Ramaiah. Thereupon he took Bhagavan to be his *guru* and decided to stay at Arunachala. For a long time he stayed at the mango-tree cave performing *tapas*. Later, he built an *ashram* at the village where his mother lived and divided his time between the village and Arunachala.

Owing to his goodwill and love towards all beings, even towards poisonous animals like serpents he was never harmed by any creature. He had several occult powers. One among those who experienced them was Paul Brunton, who said that because of Yogi Ramaiah he experienced a stillness of mind. Ramaiah's disciples celebrate his *Jayanti* year after year.

Narasimha Iyer:

Author of Bhagavan's biography in English, and a translation of Bhagavan's *Upadesa saram*, he hailed from

Salem. As a lawyer and a freedom fighter he became quite famous and in spite of being made fun of, spoke in his mother tongue (Tamil) in the Madras Legislative Assembly. His domestic life took an unexpected turn with the accidental death of both his sons on the same day. With that shock he turned towards spiritual life and came to Arunachala in 1928. He stayed at the *Ashram* for about three years. He took great pains in collecting details of Bhagavan's life; he obtained written statements from various persons, and brought out a biography of Bhagavan (*Self-Realisation*). He mastered western psychology as well as spiritual literature in Sanskrit. He was a very great devotee of Bhagavan but took care not to exaggerate anything about him in the biography and succeeded in turning many persons towards Bhagavan. He had great interest in reconciling eastern and western spiritual thought and he believed that even in deep sleep the mind was very much in existence. In support of this belief he cited the facts that but for the presence of the mind there could be no recollection of happiness during sleep or the capacity to wake up at a pre-determined time. He held that thoughts of the waking state weakened and resulted in absent- mindedness, day dreams, dreams and deep sleep. Bhagavan would try to convince him that in the deep sleep state the mind would only be in abeyance (*laya*) but would not be destroyed (*nasa*) and that because the mind was so weak it could be taken to be practically non-existent.

SUDDHANANDA BHARATI:

Author of Bhagavan's biography in Tamil, he became famous as a journalist and author even quite early in life.

His Tamil work *Bharata Sakti* is quite well known. He developed a great liking for national education and in collaboration with VVS Ayyar established a *Gurukula* at Cheranmahadevi. He had an interest in naturopathy as well. In order to know the essence of all religions he studied all religious texts extensively. As the implementation of his lofty ideals needed *sakti,* he began worshipping *Sakti* (*Sakti -upasana)*; towards this end he learned *pranayama* and had certain spiritual experiences.

While at the famous sacred Jain spot, Sravanabelagola studying Jain scriptures, Suddhananda had a desire to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. When he reached the *Ashram*, Bhagavan's physical body could not be seen by him but only a column of light and later a *Siva Linga*. Subsequently, Bhagavan's physical form appeared before him. Suddhanananda prostrated before Bhagavan and later before Ganapati Muni who was close by. Bhagavan said to Ganapati "Is it Suddhananda the author of *Bharata Sakti*?" Suddhananda was overjoyed at that compliment. Bhagavan asked him to stay back for food to which Bharati replied "Yes Sir, But I have come for spiritual food." Suddhananda did not indulge in asking several questions, his happiness lay in savouring the mere *darshan* of Bhagavan. At that very moment several Tamil verses, welled up in him.

Bharati spent six months at Arunachala. In the holy presence his ego got destroyed and he began referring to himself in the third person, he became completely inward-looking. In order to continue his *Sakti-upasana* he left for

Sri Aurobindo *Ashram* at Pondicherry. Bharati's devotion for Bhagavan formed itself into a mellifluous poetic composition *Sri Ramana Vijayam*.

It is now necessary to refer to some who had contributed to the development of the *Ashram* and who could explain Bhagavan's teachings.

Viswanatha Brahmachari:

He came to the *Ashram* in 1923 when he was barely nineteen without informing anyone at home. His father, who did not like the son going away from home, somehow guessed that he must have reached Arunachala and landed at the *Ashram* in search of his son. The father knew the Maharshi as Venkataraman several years earlier . But on seeing the Maharshi in the new place he was astonished and said " This is not the Venkataraman I used to know." To this Bhagavan replied smiling "Oh he! It is quite sometime since he vanished." And speaking of Viswanatha, Bhagavan said, "By the time he left his home he had acquired some knowledge of Sanskrit at least, I did not have even that when I left home." Viswanatha Brahmachari had a great devotion for Ganapati Muni, associated himself with him and studied all his works.

Munagala Venkataramaiah:

He was a government official holding a high position. Round about 1925 he lost this job. Initially he stayed at the *Ashram* with his family and consulted Bhagavan in regard to all his family matters. One night he and his younger children were asleep in the hall. At about midnight he heard Bhagavan say, "Why did you come here at this time? Won't the children be afraid?" When,

Venkataramaiah opened his eyes and looked around, he saw a huge snake go out of the window past the children. He was astonished at this. Venkataramaiah's daughter, Kamakshi was an *Ashram* child. Her husband Ramachandra Kaundinya also was a great devotee of Bhagavan.

Venkataramaiah helped Bhagavan's devotees a lot. He acted as an interpreter for them in their interaction with Bhagavan and compiled those conversations in three volumes entitled *Talks with Maharshi*. He also translated into English, *Tripura Rahasyam*.

Sundaresa Iyer:

A native of Tiruvannamalai he joined Bhagavan's circle of devotees at the age of ten. He had also associated himself with Ganapati Muni and learned from him *Mantra Sastra.* Well-versed in English, Sanskrit and Tamil he frequently wrote and published articles on Bhagavan and was helpful in the *Ashram* activities. When Bhagavan's collected works were to be published as *Nool Tirattu* (Tamil) Bhagavan chose Sundaresa Iyer to write the introduction. This itself indicated his worth.

Muruganar:

A reputed scholar and Tamil poet. As he had a a great attachment for Tamil he changed his name from Subrahmanian to Muruganar . His magnum opus *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* has attained the status of a classic and is venerated by Tamil poets. He initially looked upon Bhagavan as an embodiment of all gods but later he became a votary of the concept of a formless god. He was a firm *Advaitin*. It was he who was responsible for Bhagavan's Tamil works *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu*.

Ramaswami Pillai:

He joined the *Ashram* soon after leaving college . He was a personification of service and was an embodiment of devotion towards Bhagavan. He had a good knowledge of Tamil and was fond of singing Tamil songs in praise of Bhagavan. The *Ashram* would always reverberate with his songs.

Devaraja Mudaliar:

He functioned as a Public Prosecutor at Chittoor and came to the *Ashram*. His diary, *Day by Day with Bhagavan* was published by the *Ashram.*

Griddalur Narasimha Rao:

Among the Telugu writers mention has to made of Griddalur Narasimha Rao who rendered *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ulladu Narpadu* into Telugu. For this purpose he learnt Tamil and Bhagavan had gone through all his works.

Gurram Venkata Subbaramaiah:

He also learnt Tamil. His service consisted in his translating *Ramana Gita* both into Telugu and English. It was at his request that Bhagavan selected a few *slokas* from the *Bhagavad Gita* and composed *Sri Bhagavad Gita Ratnamalika* (also known as *Sri Bhagavad Gita Saram*).

Suri Nagamma:

She could be described as *Ramana Putri*. She was widowed very young and came to Bhagavan's presence in 1941. From 1945 to 1950 she recorded in the form of letters the conversations and events which took place in Bhagavan's presence. To facilitate this work she spent most of her time at the *Ashram.* These were collectively published as *Sri Ramana Ashrama Lekhalu* in Telugu. Bhagavan was very affectionate towards her.

35. Publications

EVER since Bhagavan settled at Ramanasramam, the number of his devotees steadily increased which made it impossible for all of them to listen to his teaching directly. This necessitated the publication of books. By the time the Maharshi came to the plains from the hill his proficiency in languages was fairly high, and he could write with ease in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and Malayalam. Everyone felt that instead of others translating his works it would be preferable to have him give his teachings in his own words so that their purity could be preserved. Apart from this it was also felt that Bhagavan's teachings, hitherto in the form of poems, should be in the form of a theory also. Further, there were any number of people, who desired to know Bhagavan's theories, methods of practice, new approach and his clarifications of complicated matters of traditional scriptural literature. It became necessary to contradict certain incorrect concepts of the *Advaita* argument and lay strong foundations for *Advaita* philosophy. *Ramana Gita* was there alright to satisfy those interested in *upasana* and those who wanted a path but it did not sufficiently contradict certain philosophic arguments except sporadically. All these made it necessary for Bhagavan to author some books. They became invaluable. The books written by Bhagavan during his

stay at Ramanasramam have pithy sayings of great import , and effective refutations of other views. There was little of emotion in them.

TAMIL WORKS:

Arunachala Mahatmyam: The *Sthalapurana* of Arunachala was a very voluminous work and was not easily accessible to all. Therefore Bhagavan selected some *slokas* describing the greatness of Arunachala and rendered them into Tamil as *Arunachala Mahatmyam.*

Sarvajnanotharam: This is a Saivite *Agama* . Bhagavan translated into Tamil that part of it dealing with *Jnana*, the *Atmasakshatkara* section. This could be treated as an addition to *Devikalotharam.*

Atmavidya Kirtana: Several considered the technique of *Atmavidya* to be too deep and incomprehensible. Among those who disagreed with this view was Murugunar, the great poet, who authored *Ramana Sannidhi Murai* . He placed a piece of paper before Bhagavan one day on which he wrote the refrain:

Lo, very easy is self knowledge
Lo, very easy indeed.

As he could not complete the lyric he stopped with the refrain. Bhagavan saw it and took upon himself the task of completing the song.

Upadesa Saram: Muruganar looked upon Bhagavan as Siva. He himself had written copiously in praise of Siva. The theme of one of his poems was the *Leela* (sport) of Siva at Daruka forest. Therein, Siva undertakes to teach *tatva* to the *Rishis*. Muruganar wished to incorporate Bhagavan's teachings as Siva's *Upadesa.* He wrote Siva's

Leela in about seventy verses and requested Bhagavan to complete the *Upadesa* part of the poem in thirty verses. In Tamil Nadu, from ancient times, a particular type of village dance prevailed in which the pauses in the steps were known as 'Undipara.' A particular metre and rhythm had also been prescribed for it. Bhagavan adopted that metre for the poem which was titled in Tamil, *Upadesa Undiyar.* As a devotee rightly commented, a writing full of analogies might appeal to ordinary people but for those with a desire to know the depths of philosophy only sentences – embodying the *siddanta*-would appeal. In this poem, Bhagavan, expressed the *siddhanta* in a poetic form.

To begin with, there is a statement that the body or *karma* is insentient, the fruit of *karma* is granted by the Lord-a refutation of the proposition in *Poorva-mimamsa* . Gradually, the poem touches upon *bhakti*, *yoga* and *jnana margas* and comes up with the essence of *Advaita*.

Bhagavan gave the title of *Upadesa Saram* in Sanskrit for this compilation and sent it to Ganapati Muni who was then at the mango tree cave, for his opinion. Ganapati Muni was struck by the beauty of the poem and showed it to several Sanskrit scholars exclaiming "Can any one of us compose a single verse like this? Who among us has the capacity to comment on these verses? Yet we all claim to be Sanskrit scholars!" Soon thereafter, Ganapati Muni wrote a brief commentary on the poem in just two and half hours. That was translated into Tamil.

As the poem was not available in Telugu, Ramaiah Yogi requested Bhagavan for one. Thereupon, Bhagavan

himself wrote the poem in Telugu. With the help of Ganapati Muni, Swami Pranavananda wrote a Telugu commentary. Subsequently, Bhagavan himself wrote the poem in Malayalam too.

Ulladu Narpadu: Muruganar used to ask Bhagavan various questions on philosophic matters for which the latter's replies were in verse form. Such verses added up to forty (*narpadu*, in Tamil). Thereupon, at the suggestion of Ganapati Muni, Muruganar arranged them in a particular sequence. As the verses were about "What is" or "Reality" (*Ulladu*, in Tamil) the poem was titled *Ulladu Narpadu* (or, *Reality in Forty Verses*). Apart from these forty verses, occasionally, Bhagavan would give replies to Muruganar and others by translating into Tamil, some verses from other languages. In addition, there were twelve occasional verses written by Bhagavan. All these fell short of forty. At the request of Krishna Bhikshu Bhagavan made up the balance. These forty came to be known as Supplement to *Ulladu Narpadu.* In Telugu, the Supplement is known as *Sookti Sudha.*

At the request of Ramaiah Yogi, Bhagavan translated *Ulladu Narpadu* into Telugu prose under the title *Unnadi Nalubadi.* Later on, several people put them in verse form. The book itself is pregnant with insight and is a guide to *jnana*. There are many arguments to refute the views expressed against *Advaita*. The book is in simple style and abounds in excellent similies.

Ganapati Muni translated the work (excluding the Supplement) into Sanskrit under the title *Sat-darsan*. A

commentary thereon, was written by Kapali Sastry, disciple of Ganapati Muni. Kapali Sastry himself translated the entire work into English.

Bhagavan wrote another poem in Sanskrit where the four stanzas began with the expressions *De'ham* (The body) *Na'ham* (I am not), *Ko'ham* (Who am I?), *So'ham* (That I am). This was written at the request of Ganapati Muni.

Apart from these original writings Bhagavan also made some selections from traditional texts and in some cases, wrote Tamil translations for them. Among such works may be mentioned *Tayumanuvar* (Tamil work) and others like *Vivekachoodamani*, *Sivananda Lahari*, *Yoga Vasishta*, *Bhagavad Gita*. Some other translations have been incorporated in the 'Supplement' mentioned above.

Occasional Verses:

Bhagavan also wrote a few verses occasionally, some of them were:

1) From *Rama Gita*:-

"Even the conjurer deludes the world, but is not himself deluded. How strange would it be if the *Siddha* himself is deluded and adds to the delusion of the world."

– Translation - *Collected Works*

2) Ganesa:

One day a potter brought and gifted a small image of Ganesa to Bhagavan, at Virupaksha cave. On that occasion Bhagavan wrote the following verse:

"He who begot you as a child you made
Into a beggar; as a child yourself
You then lived everywhere just to support

Your own huge belly; I too am a child.
Oh child god in that niche! Encountering one
Born after you, is your heart made of stone?
I pray you look at me!"

– Translation - *Collected Works*

3) Arunachala Ramana

Sometime in 1914-1915 Amritananda Yati wrote on a paper a verse asking Bhagavan to say whether he was Hari (Vishnu) or Sivaguru (Subrahmanya) or Yativara (Siva) or Vararuchi. Bhagavan wrote the following reply on the same piece of paper

> In the recesses of the lotus-shaped hearts of all, beginning with Vishnu, there shines as pure intellect (absolute consciousness) the *Paramatman*, who is the same as Arunachala Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him, and reaches the inmost recesses of the Heart wherein He dwells as the beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as pure consciousness.
>
> – Translation - *Collected Works*

4. The Stomach's complaint

In 1931, on a festive occasion after a sumptuous meal, one devotee quoted a poem of Avvayar the Tamil saint-poetess, a complaint about the stomach, "You will not go without food even for one day, nor will you take enough for two days at a time. You have no idea of the trouble I have on your account. Oh wretched stomach! It is impossible to get on with you."

Bhagavan immediately wrote a parody thereon giving the stomach's complaint against the ego:

"You will not give even an hour's rest to me; you ego! Day after day, every hour, you keep on eating! You have no idea how I suffer. Oh trouble-making ego! It is impossible to get on with you!"

– Translation - *Collected Works*

5) Sivarathri:

"The day on which the ancient and wonderful *linga* of Arunachala took shape is the asterism of Ardra in the month of Mrigasira. And the day on which Vishnu and the other *devas* worshipped the Lord in the form of effulgence is the day Mahasivarathri."

– Translation - *Collected Works*

In order to publish Bhagavan's works, Sri Ramanasrama Granthamala was established. All of Bhagavan's Tamil works and translations of those works into other languages thus came to be published.

Bhagavan's biography in different languages like '*Self Realisation*' (English) *Sri Ramana Vijayam* (Tamil) and *Sri Ramana Charitamrit* (Hindi) got published.* Lately a lot of Ramana literature in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali and Kannada is also being published. *Sat-darsan*, *Sri Ramana Gita*, *Sat-darsana Bhashya*, *Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat* are some of the Sanskrit works published.

Bhagavan's direct *upadesa*, especially his Silent-*Upadesa*, was the best. The books constitute the next best. Of course, any number of writings by others are available in different languages.

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* *Sri Ramana Leela* (Telugu) was also published in 1936 – Translator.

36. Light of the World

> *"Like the energy of the distant Sun your sakti falls on me and removes my sorrow."*
>
> – Ganapati Muni

THE advent of Jesus was heralded when a star arose in the sky showing the wise men the way to the place where he was born. Historically, the light of knowledge arose in the East and shone in the Western world.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana's message was passed on to the West very early by Humphreys.

Humphreys:

The story of Humphreys itself was unusual. He arrived at Bombay in 1911 on being appointed as an Assistant Superintendent of Police, and within a short time of landing at Bombay fell sick. By then he already had practised *yoga* and was capable of travelling to any place in the subtle body leaving the gross one. Through his subtle body, Humphreys was able to find a Pandit *(Munshi)* at Vellore to teach him Telugu. On March 18, the Telugu Pandit, Sarvepalli Narasimham (later, Swami Pranavanada) came to him.

The student began questioning the *Munshi* about philosophic matters. He also asked the teacher to fetch him books on astrology. The next day when the *Munshi*

came, he asked him if there were any *Mahatmas* in the vicinity and if he knew any such one. The *Munshi* probably thought that all talk of a *guru* to the Englishman was unwarranted and hence replied that he knew no *Mahatma*. The next day, the student said, "*Munshi*, you said yesterday that you did not know of any *Mahatma* but your *guru* appeared in my dream this morning. In fact, you were the first person of Vellore that I saw even at Bombay." The *Munshi* protested that he had never visited Bombay at all. Thereupon, the student told him of the occult powers acquired by him through the practice of *yoga*. The teacher was impressed and as requested by the student, showed him some pictures of great souls. On seeing Ganapati Muni's picture, Humphreys exclaimed, "This is the great man who appeared in my dream this morning. Is he not your *guru*?" Then the *Munshi* had to acknowledge that Ganapati Muni was indeed his *guru*.

Within a fortnight, Humphreys fell ill again and had to be moved to Ootacamund. He kept writing to the *Munshi* every now and then. Once he wrote that he saw a person with matted hair, a long beard and brilliant eyes. On another occasion, he said that he proposed to give up non-vegetarian food to facilitate his practice of *pranayama* and *dhyana*. On yet another occasion, he asked whether it would be proper for him to rejoin an esoteric society of which he was a member earlier. After the return of Humphreys from Ootacamund, he and the *Munshi* joined Ganapati Muni in November 1911 on a visit to the Maharshi. In his very first question posed to Bhagavan,

his struggle as a youth, his high ideals and his desire to help others were revealed. The Maharshi also spoke to him partly in English.

Humphreys: Swami, can I do anything to reform the world?

Maharshi: You reform yourself first. It is as good as reforming the world.

Humphreys: I wish to do good to the world, will I not be able to do it?

Maharshi: You do good to yourself first, after all you are also part of the world. Not only that, you are the world, the world is you. Both are not apart.

Humphreys (after a pause): "Swami, will I not be able to perform any miracles like Krishna, Jesus and the like?

Maharshi: Did those people think that they were performing miracles while doing those acts?

Again after a pause Humphreys replied in the negative.

Maharshi perhaps thought that interest in such powers would cause harm to Humphreys and warned him that the only thing to be obtained was the *atma* and that he should devote all his energies towards that end. He added that Humphreys should work towards the goal with an attitude of complete self-surrender.

Bhagavan once described Arunachala as a unique hill of light, so was he. Those who visited him once were bound to return over and over again. Humphreys paid a visit to Bhagavan a second time. In the midday hot sun, he travelled all the forty miles from Vellore on a motor cycle to Tiruvannamalai and there, picking up Raghavachari, a

P.W.D. Supervisor, paid a visit to Bhagavan. He was tired and dust-laden; on seeing him, Bhagavan offered him some refreshments and quietened him. At that moment, the District Munsiff A.S. Krishnaswami Iyer was also there. With both Raghavachari and Krishnaswami acting as interpreters the conversation proceeded.

Humphreys: Swami, I easily forget the lessons, only the last words remain in my memory. What should I do?

Maharshi: You can attend to your duty as well as to your meditation.

Humphreys had Bhagavan's *darshan* a third time. By then his regard for him had reached such a level that he considered it sacreligious to climb the hill with his shoes and hat on. So, he discarded them and reached the cave barefoot. Bhagavan while returning to the cave from somewhere saw Humphreys' belongings on the way and asked Palaniswami, who was with him, to pick them up. No one knew what instructions Bhagavan gave Humphreys on that occasion.

Humphreys wrote a letter to his friend in England, detailing his visits to Bhagavan and the instructions he received. The friend, Felix Rudols, put it in the form of an article and got it published in the International Psychic Gazette. Later, that article was translated into several other languages and seekers of various lands benefited from the instructions of Bhagavan. Much later, the Englishman quit his job and became a monk of the Roman Catholic Church.

Imagine an Englishman becoming a devotee of Bhagavan and becoming instrumental in spreading

Bhagavan's message abroad. This happened several decades ago and helped several seekers.

Among such seekers, the first was Harry Dickman who belonged to Riga in Latvia, a country west of Russia along the Baltic Coast.

DICKMAN:

Quite early in life he became interested in *yoga* and studied *Hatha yoga, Raja yoga* and practised certain *asanas* prescribed in the former. He had several students also who came to him to learn yoga.

Dickman developed intense devotion and faith in Bhagavan and trusted him in everything. He also translated into his native language *Upadesa saram* and *Who am I*. He would refer to Bhagavan the problems faced by him and his students in their practice of *yoga* and follow Bhagavan's instructions thereon. He had great faith in celibacy and respect for the Aryan Vedanta. He also believed that there was a close affinity in languages as well as knowledge between his country and India. He revealed that that part of his country where he lived was known as Kurujeemi i.e., Kurukshetra, in his language. In order to learn Aryan Vedanta first hand he learnt Sanskrit and English and also acquired some knowledge of Hindi. He made a thorough study of Vivekananda's collected works and lived in accordance with their teachings. Further, he sought to know the implications of the *mahavakyas* from Bhagavan. He also believed that in matters spiritual, *advaita* was the last word. He and his disciples regularly celebrated Bhagavan's *jayanti* every year.

Paul Brunton:

Book reviewer for the journal "Forum" published from London, "Brunton" was a pen-name; his real name being Raphael Hurst. A Jew by birth, he was a British citizen. Right from his young days he had a religious bent of mind. In order to acquire esoteric skills he became a member of the Theosophical Society and though he spent two years there he was not satisfied.

Believing that in the Eastern countries many people specialized in secret skills he visited some *sadhus*, and *fakirs* and wrote a book *A Search in Secret India* on his experiences. In that book he praised Bhagavan saying that among all those he visited, Bhagavan was unequalled and that he considered Bhagavan to be his *guru*. Well-written as it was, the book soon became popular and many westerners turned towards Bhagavan. In that book Brunton gave his experiences at Arunachala in detail. Brunton on his visit to Bhagavan prostrated himself and sat in front of Bhagavan, who had a peaceful, serene look. Brunton imagined at first that those looks were meant to impress devotees but soon that suspicion was removed.

He became aware of a gradual transformation within himself and felt that a steady river of peace was flowing round him and that peace was entering his being calming down his turbulent mind. He recognised the peace and happiness experienced by Bhagavan's devotees, within himself. Suddenly he realized that the intellect created its own problems and then made itself miserable trying to solve them. He also realized that his new-found peace

and wisdom were due to Bhagavan's grace. He wondered if the Maharshi "emanated the perfume of spiritual peace as a flower emanates fragrance from its petals." But this peace did not last long. It vanished after a little while and the mind reverted to its habitual unrest.

He later said of the Maharshi,

> by frequently visiting this sun of wisdom the darkness of ignorance cannot but vanish I also noticed that in his silent moments he took me into his world of peace.
>
> The fact that Bhagavan's *mouna* was more powerful than his speech became evident at such moments. Behind his undisturbed *mouna* there was a tremendous power. By this power he could enslave others without uttering a single word or lifting a little finger.

Sometimes Brunton felt the power to be so intense that at such moments he would carry out any command of Bhagavan's. But the Maharshi never sought to make his disciples his slaves; he allowed them complete freedom. There was a world of difference between other *guru*s and Bhagavan in this respect. Brunton wrote:

> He was utterly simple, his lofty grandeur was visible in his presence. He never exhibited his occult powers to impress others. He deprecated all attempts to worship him as a deity and resented all kinds of exhibitionism.
>
> We cannot but accept that such a Mahatma has come to dispense knowledge to us and not to indulge in futile argumentation.

The Maharshi's method which did not rest on any miracles or blind superstition, his example which could be followed and his outlook have greatly impressed me. I greatly appreciate the Maharshi's spiritual sublimity and his absolutely scientific self-enquiry path. In this path there is no mention of 'God' at all.

He puts forward a way of self-analysis which can be practised irrespective of any ancient or modern theories or beliefs which one may hold, a way that will finally lead man to true self understanding.

Though the Maharshi remains in *mouna*, in this practice the *sadhaka* feels that some power emanates from him to help the *sadhaka*.

Maharshi's eyes glow like twin stars through the half-darkness. I remind myself that never have I met in any man eyes as remarkable as those of this last descendant of India's Rishis. Insofar as the human eyes can mirror divine power, it is a fact that the sage's do that.

BHIKKU PRAJNANANDA:

An Englishman and an Oxonian, his earlier name was Frederick Fletcher. He mastered several European languages and was a commander of the armed forces during the world war. The immense destruction and loss of life during the war touched him. He was repelled at the slaughter and like Emperor Asoka gave up a military career, became inward looking and embraced Buddhism and even became a Buddhist *bhikku* (monk). He travelled through Burma and Tibet moving about and living among Buddhist monks. He established an *ashram*, the English Ashram, at Rangoon (in Burma).

In 1932, he spent two months at Ramanasramam and heard Bhagavan's teachings in person. He profited greatly by them and developed a reverential attitude towards Bhagavan. After going back, he kept in touch through correspondence seeking Bhagavan's advice on matters spiritual. He also would write to his friends extolling Bhagavan's divine qualities. In the *Sunday Express* of 28 May 1933 there was an article about him under the caption, 'Men with the Elixir of Life.'

Ms. Pascaline Mallet:

Another devotee was Ms. Pascaline Mallet, a French lady, and author of 'Turn Eastwards'. So was Joyce. H. Hidding. All these devotees wrote several articles and books on Ramana's philosophy.

Chadwick:

Mention must be made of Allen Wentworth Chadwick who also was a Major in the army and who also could not bear the violence of war and went looking for peace – thus he turned towards philosophy.

He roamed about all over and spent sometime in South America, meditating. Finally, hearing Bhagavan's story he reached Ramanasramam. He became a resident there.

His dedication towards Bhagavan was boundless. Initially, he used to do *girpradakshina* but later he felt there was no difference between the hill and Bhagavan and commenced doing the *pradakshina* of the hall where Bhagavan sat. He worked for the publication of English books by the *Ashram*.

Other devotees:

A number of Western devotees had frequent *darshan* of Bhagavan, some stayed back in India and propagated Bhagavan's teachings. Among them were Maurice Frydman, Cohen and Duncan Greenlees.

Several German scholars heard of Bhagavan's message and were attracted to it. Dr. H. Zimmer, a Professor at the Heidelberg University, developed great interest in Bhagavan's teachings. He translated into German books such as *Who am I? Ulladu Narpadu* and *Crumbs from the Master's Table*. He later migrated to England and took up a job at the Oxford University during the period of turmoil which arose in Germany.

Several books relating to Bhagavan were translated into French.

In Switzerland, Ms. Olge Frobe Kepkyn, built an *ashram* to facilitate meditation at a beautiful tourist spot (Casa Garbrivella Ascona-Tessim) where Bhagavan's *jayanti* began to be celebrated. She always wished that someone from Ramanasramam should go there and act as a *guru*. But at Ramanasramam the objective was not propaganda. The *Ashram* felt that seekers should experience the Ultimate, something which each one had to do by himself and could not be done through lectures.

37. The Presence

RAMANA'S message had spread all over the world. Seekers from all lands would flock to have a *darshan* of Bhagavan and to spend some time in his presence. Even after Ramana shed his body, the flow of visitors did not diminish. What could be the attraction of his presence?

The reason for some people's visit was their *karma* and the bond of attachment of some earlier birth. Once, a devotee lamented, "We do not know where we would be in the next birth or whether we would be able to reach your *sannidhi* (presence) again." Bhagavan consoled him, "Did we get together now without any connection in some earlier birth, similarly won't the present association help retain it in future births?" The first manifestation of Bhagavan's grace is to attract the seeker here. Did not Bhagavan attract Harry Dickman living in a far off place?

To be attracted to Bhagavan's presence is itself the result of merit earned in several births and should not the present service result in something much better? "No one who comes here goes in vain. According to their *samskara* they will reach the next higher step," said Bhagavan.

Some devotees revealed that Bhagavan himself inspired them to visit the *Ashram*.

In 1933, a school teacher of Maharashtra visited the *Ashram*. His experience was as follows: "Why don't you visit me?" said the Swami to him in a dream.

"I don't know who you are," was the reply in the dream.

"I am Ramana," said Bhagavan.

"I have never heard of you. I also do not know where you stay."

"You come to Madras and make enquiries."

"I am too poor to undertake the journey. Where am I to get the money from?"

"Go and ask (such-and-such) Seth," Bhagavan named the Seth. After this conversation, the teacher woke up from the dream.

He had no acquaintance with the Seth named. But the matter did not stop with words. On his way to the school the next morning, the teacher noticed a jeweller's shop in which the particular Seth was seated all alone. The teacher went in and told him about the dream. The Seth was familiar with Ramana's name but did not know where the *Mahatma* lived. Without uttering a single word he gave the required amount to the teacher who made the journey to Arunachala. This was something like God himself appearing and forcing a boon.

Some, tormented by worldly affairs reached the presence for consolation and peace.

An American lady asked Bhagavan, "Is it alright to kill oneself?" Bhagavan replied, "If you have the *sakti*, alright. Yet how can you kill the Self? You maybe able to kill the

body but the Self cannot be killed. Is it not indestructible? Yet what is the use of killing the body, you may acquire a tortured body. It is only that one with the body experiences heaven and hell. There is another point. The *sastras* say the next birth would be according to what one thinks of at the moment of death. What if you think of a demon at the last moment? You could be reborn a demon. Isn't a human birth better than that of a demon? So, even if you give up the physical body, the suffering associated with the body cannot be avoided. The best thing to do is to kill the thought which identifies *ahamkara* (ego) with the Self."

For some, a visit to Ramanasramam became a matter of satisfaction and for some others, an event to brag about. Lately, Maharajas have been frequenting the *Ashram*. As a result, a visit to the *Ashram* has become a status symbol among the rich and elite circles.

Some visited the *Ashram* as a place of pilgrimage. Recently an American lady came all the way from America, spent a few hours at the *Ashram* and went back the same evening. Bhagavan commented: "Have you noticed her devotion? She felt a mere *darshan* was more than enough!"

Some visit the *Ashram* to establish the superiority of their religion. One such was a Muslim who began arguing with Bhagavan. Yet Bhagavan undertook to answer his questions patiently. The visitor asked Bhagavan, "Has God a form?"

Bhagavan: Who said that God has a form?

Visitor: If so, is it proper to give Him a form and worship His images?

Bhagavan: Leave God alone. Do you have a form?

Visitor: Sure enough and you see it. But I am not God.

Bhagavan: So you say that you are this body made of flesh, bones and blood.

Visitor: It seems so.

Bhagavan: You say so because you see it now. But during deep sleep you don't see it. So, who are you?

Visitor: Even then I am only this. After all, we see it before going to sleep and after the sleep.

Bhagavan: What happens at death?

Visitor: Then I am dead and buried.

Bhagavan: If you are buried will you accept it? Why does not the body get up and protest against being buried?

Visitor: If so, I am not the body. I am the life in the body.

Bhagavan: But till now you thought you were the body and that you had a form. The dispute whether God has a form or not lasts only so long as this *ajnana* (ignorance) persists. Until you are able to experience the formless 'I' you cannot worship a formless God.

On another occasion, a Catholic missionary began lecturing to Bhagavan on his religion. Bhagavan simply kept quiet. Meanwhile, Chadwick began refuting the missionary's comments on the Bible in his stentorian voice. With that the visitor stopped his mission.

Those who go about on this mission are merely satisfied with the molasses but they cannot taste the sweetness of the cane. The really cultivated must savour the overflowing peace in the atmosphere of the hall and let their emotional upheavals subside. The power and force of that current of peace as experienced by several devotees like Humphreys and Paul Brunton has already been alluded to. In fact, that usually was the initial experience of Bhagavan's grace.

With the subsiding of emotion and the establishment of tranquillity, a peculiar thing occurred in the presence. Seekers had several doubts on spiritual matters but all those doubts simply vanished as it were. Some even did not have to express their doubts. A lawyer from Nellore visited Bhagavan with a written list of his doubts. But in the presence he could not utter even a single word. Bhagavan himself out of abundant grace towards him said, "You may ask."

Another peculiar thing happened once. A well educated Nepali feudal lord visited the *Ashram*. He was accompanied by his servant, a Gurkha. The feudal lord sat in front of the office and was rehearsing the questions he had to ask Bhagavan. Meanwhile the servant ran to Bhagavan and narrated those questions in his own language. Bhagavan merely looked at him silently. The servant ran back to his master and repeated the answers given by Bhagavan saying "This is what Bhagavan said." The master was astonished and asked him, "Does Bhagavan know our language?" and without leaving it at that, himself

went to Bhagavan and asked him whether Bhagavan was familiar with their language. Those present in the hall burst out into loud laughter. One of the devotees present told the Nepali that Bhagavan was silent all the time and that his silence itself gave the replies and that this was one of Bhagavan's ways of teaching. This *mouna-upadesa* could be similar to what Dakshinamurti imparted to his disciples.

In earlier years, there was no practice of reciting the Vedas in Bhagavan's presence. But for some reason it was started and thus a new phase came up. Those who savoured the earlier phase of *mouna* must have noticed the difference between the two phases. Evenings, especially the period of dusk, was one where silence reigned once. It could also be described as the meeting point of the *jeeva* and *Brahman*!

The *mouna* was also interrupted either wittingly or otherwise by some who kept on raising minor points with Bhagavan repeatedly. The reason for this was rather unclear – either they wished to show off that they belonged to the inner circle of Bhagavan or wanted to know answers straight from Bhagavan for the sake of authenticity. Some of these points related to Bhagavan's life story as already recorded in books or to their own mundane life. Yet, some others attempted to show off their erudition. Some others exhibited their musical talents in Bhagavan's presence perhaps under the impression that it was all *seva*.

About the significance and power of the presence Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni used to tell his disciplies, "Arunachala itself is a *kshetra* (place) of fire. The water here itself causes heat in the body. This land is dry, elevated

and hot. Bhagavan is the personification of *agni*. To be in his presence is itself to be in the midst of fire. Those who perform *japa* in the presence of Bhagavan will feel unbearable burning sensation within. The results of any act performed in a sacred place will be pronounced. Similarly for acts performed in Bhagavan's presence. Be cautious in your *japa*."

Transformation of the individual in Bhagavan's presence would always be intense and fast. Those with good tendencies got attracted and their transformation also would be speedy. This also was a manifestation of Bhagavan's grace.

It is not possible to describe the grace of Bhagavan when he was silent. By looking at his eyes one could notice how indifferent he was to the world around him. It was at such moments that the waves of peace emanating from him could be experienced. Also, devotees had various other experiences – like visions, hearing sounds and even an experience of that nameless and formless state – all these due to the power of the presence. In any case, as all these were purely personal experiences, nothing more can be said of them. Some, like Paul Brunton, have recorded those experiences.

Naturally, a question would arise as to why everyone did not have these experiences. The short answer is that they depended on the individual's latent tendencies. Kavyakantha also is reported to have said that while in the presence the devotee should not be seated directly opposite Bhagavan lest all their family ties get snapped. Whether

Kavyakantha really said so could not be confirmed but several men who introduced themselves to Bhagavan lost their wives. It was a common experience of some who came to Bhagavan to lose their close relatives – leading to their attachments getting snapped. This was also a manifestation of Bhagavan's grace.

Grace by eye contact was rare. Bhagavan's vision rested on some devotee or other for a very brief moment during his *mouna*. It resulted in a tremendous power accruing to the devotee. Sometimes Bhagavan would concentrate that power on someone. Before answering questions raised by devotees Bhagavan sometimes looked at the devotee closely. At such moments it appeared to the devotee as if Bhagavan was seeing with only one eye. Like a javelin, a ray would emanate from his eye and pierce the devotee. It meant that Bhagavan scrutinized the inner being and then replied. The brilliance of the vision would be like an electric light in utter darkness. By that grace all impediments in our *sadhana* would be removed enabling us to continue the *sadhana*. This could be described as his greatest grace. This could also be described as his initiation by look (*kataksha diksha*) which was more powerful than *diksha* by touch or *upadesa*. This was what was known as *guru-diksha* (initiation by the guru). A few persons, among them Kulkarni of Maharashtra, claimed that they had initiation by touch also.

More than Bhagavan's *upadesa* through the spoken word, devotees got greater benefit by his silent presence. Yet, as Bhagavan himself said, mere presence did not

bestow liberation. Once a devotee asked, "When it is said that mere *satsang* is enough for liberation, why is any effort on our part necessary?" Bhagavan remarked, "Is it so? The walls and roof of this hall are still there – should they not have got liberation by now?" What Bhagavan meant was that effort of the seeker also was necessary to attain *moksha*. Bhagavan also said that the grace of the *guru* operates only at the final stages of *sadhana*. Though the world is not beheld by the *sadhaka* in the last stages, due to the persistence of *vasanas* the Self is not experienced and it is at this stage that the grace of the *guru*, which really is the grace of the *atma*, works and bestows the Ultimate. It is the same thing that is mentioned in the *Kathopanishad*. Bhagavan said that only such a *guru* could be described as a *sadguru*, unlike other types of *guru*s. He would accomplish the job in a trice.

From the above discussion it would be obvious that Bhagavan's mere physical presence was the greatest grace bestowed by him. The vibrations of peace and brilliance emanating from that body conferred immense benefits on humanity. There still remained a question whether those vibrations emanated out of Bhagavan's volition or automatically.

The results depended on the status of the *prarabdha* of the devotee. Mere contact of the devotee's body with the voluntary vibrations of Bhagavan gave good results in some cases. This was one way in which grace showed itself.

Bhagavan himself said that several celestial bodies (*devatas*) surrounded *siddha-purushas* and that whatever was to be accomplished was done by those *devatas*. Yet, in

some extraordinary situations Bhagavan himself bestowed grace by his own *sankalpa*.

Sundaresa Iyer once wrote a lyric where he said "Grace flows from Bhagavan." Bhagavan corrected it saying, "It is not so. It should read – "Grace is made to flow." But who could guess what those extraordinary circumstances were? It was a common experience of many that several ailments got cured in Bhagavan's presence. All around Bhagavan everything had to be according to his *sakti*, there could be no contrariness or dissonance. Any such contrariness got rectified and this applied to even physical imbalances and thus ailments got cured (recall the case of Ramaswami Iyer). A number of persons had vouched that at Ramanasramam their health improved and their digestive power also increased and that such a thing did not happen at any other place. The influence of the presence extended even to the land.

All the foregoing discussion could be of interest to seekers. But for the large number of children, squirrels, peacocks, dogs and unlettered persons who were very free with Bhagavan, the philosophic points were of little concern. For them Bhagavan was an ocean of bliss in which they could revel.

How can anyone describe that bewitching smile or the brilliance of those eyes – they had only to be experienced, not written about.

That presence was like Kailasa, the abode of Siva Sankara.

38. The Method of Teaching

ONCE somebody asked Bhagavan, "Why don't you visit places and guide people on the right path as Sankara and some others did?"

Bhagavan: Merely being physically alive is itself an act of grace of *Mahatmas*. Even if they keep quiet, the vibrations set off by the power of their *tapas* spreads harmony and peace.

The question itself was inappropriate in the first place. Divine beings come into the world with a purpose and no distractions of their mission are desirable. The Maharshi's abidance in the Self was intended to demonstrate the importance of experiential knowledge as distinct from mere bookish knowledge. The desire for experiential wisdom depends on one's *samskara* and there is no use trying to inspire those who do not desire liberation. Further, *mouna-upadesa* is best. That subtle power touches the subtle body of the seeker and influences his *samskara*. Instead of preferring this why look for speech which is gross?

On another occasion a similar question was put to Bhagavan, to which he replied, "If you go and ask an electric fan to give light, it won't give it. So is the case with an

electric light if it is asked to provide breeze." Each person had an allotted role to play, that was what Bhagavan meant.

"If I start out to visit a different place to see devotees, on the way there will be several halts and it will take a long time to reach the destination," said Bhagavan. To a young girl who pleaded with Bhagavan to visit their place, Bhagavan said, "If you take me to your place won't all those devotees who come here be disappointed? Won't they also say that they would take me to another place?"

It is not as if everyone desired liberation. A number of persons visiting Bhagavan were filled with sorrow. For those who sought refuge at Bhagavan's feet in view of their mundane affairs or health problems what was the use of any *upadesa?* Even so, the diseased and the agitated were given some peace which was a source of solace for them. Yet others visited him to show off their erudition. On such occasions Bhagavan simply observed *mouna*. Like the clouds of autumn, which did not bear any water yet thundered they also would talk for some time and depart.

In fact, Bhagavan himself said that exhibition of perverse scholarship was abundant in several commentaries. He also said that though there were several sayings supportive of *advaita*, people interpreted them as being in favour of *Vaishnavism*. For instance, in one case, Nammalwar's saying: "Oh Lord, without knowing your true nature I thought you were different from me. But after knowing you, only you remain." Simply put, this is supportive of *advaita* but commentators made perverse interpretations, said Bhagavan.

Some were too lazy to read any scriptural text. They came to Bhagavan for clarifications on simple matters which could be got by reading any elementary spiritual text. But they would want a reply straight from Bhagavan, no less. But Bhagavan used to oblige them patiently. In yet other cases, devotees would seek clarifications on points noticed in some books. Bhagavan would make matters clear to them easily. Some did not want any discussions and even after various types of *sadhana,* made little progress which was due to their worldly desires. Unless that abated, any spiritual enquiry was a waste. And yet to be rid of desires how many births did one need? Bhagavan did not discourage his devotees. In his view, complete freedom from desire meant acquisition of *jnana*. Unless one abided in the Self, complete *vairagya* and disappearance of desire was impossible for anyone. But a question often arose whether there was any prescribed level of *vairagya* for self enquiry. Bhagavan's reply to Natanananda revealed his attitude in this regard: "If you really are unfit why did the desire to visit *Mahatmas* arise in the first place?" In other words, the very arising of a good intention was enough of a qualification. Bhagavan's view also was that *vairagya* could result from self enquiry.

All seekers needed *vairagya*, and it had to be obtained. Yet Bhagavan never said that a relentless battle against desire had to be waged. Bhagavan would say, "If a bird caught in a net struggles to free itself it will only get strangled. So do not pay any attention to desires. Just as other desires arise, even evil desires do. By using the

technique of "*neti-neti*" or asking yourself, 'To whom are these desires arising?,' in the self enquiry path, uproot the evil desire. It will fall along with branches, leaves, flowers and buds."

Sri Ramakrishna looked upon his spouse as the Mother of the Universe and escaped the hold of desire. Similarly after savouring Bhagavan's sweet name who would prefer to seek the sweetness of any other thing?

Bhagavan's teaching was simple: pay no attention to anything except the *atma.* No one need doubt its efficacy. There were any number of devotees who after a prolonged and futile struggle surrendered themselves to Bhagavan and got out of the mire.

For *vairagya* to intensify there were various aids like, *japa, homa, satsang,* association with *Mahatmas* – as also keeping up regularity, said Bhagavan. But all those should be within certain limits as means to an end and not as hindrances to self-enquiry itself.

Some came to the *Ashram* due to the *vairagya* caused by the sorrow suffered in domestic life and under the impression that as Bhagavan himself left his home there was nothing wrong in their also wanting to renounce. Natanananda was one such who was discouraged by Bhagavan from taking to *sannyasa*. Once a person who thought that he did not have Bhagavan's grace wanted to commit suicide and came to the *Ashram* for a last *darshan*. At that very moment Bhagavan was saying to someone else "Have you noticed how much of effort is involved in preparing leaf-plates. You have to collect the leaves and

dry the split pieces of bamboo or other wood, clean the leaves and then stitch in order to keep them together. Having done so, you are not going to throw them away immediately isn't it? You throw the leaf away only after you have had your meal." The *upadesa* here was that the body could not be discarded until it had gone through all experiences ordained for it.

Bhagavan certainly was aware that the ideal in life varied according to the individual's stage of development and *vasanas.* Accordingly there were instances where Bhagavan approved of worship of God with a form in some cases. Taking this as a cue worshippers of Sakti took Bhagavan to be one among themselves. Vaishnavites felt that there was no difference between their own beliefs and Bhagavan's *upadesa*. It was similarly possible for Christians to believe that what Bhagavan taught was no different from their own tenets. Generally Bhagavan never tried to wean away anyone from the path already being followed by him or her. Bhagavan held that whatever path was being followed, ultimately everyone would reach the stage of enquiry into the Formless and said as much. Bhagavan reminded one of the precept: "Act according to the other person's views and captivate him."

Bhagavan also did not approve of persons with different beliefs quarrelling among themselves. So long as worship of God with a form was there this conflict was inevitable.

Sometime in 1925 Vallimalai Murugan the famed singer of Tiruppugazh lyrics in praise of Lord Subrahmanya

by the poet Arunagirinathar visited Bhagavan along with a group of lawyers. They were all adepts at singing those lyrics. Murugan could sing the lyrics excellently and with emotion but did not know their meaning. Thereupon Bhagavan explained to him what the lyrics meant. Murugan came to know the meanings of the lyrics for the first time but soon became an expert in Tiruppugazh and was able to give discourses. Thus Bhagavan helped him in his worship of God with a form. One of the lawyers who came to Bhagavan asked him if chanting the Gayatri mechanically had any use. Bhagavan told him, "Chanting mechanically also is useful. One can take Savita as the subject to be meditated upon especially when reciting the last mantra, 'salutations to Savita the universal eye'."

Meditating thus upon the embodiment of that *Sakti* and surrendering to Him will help the meditator a lot. That *Sakti* knows what is good for the meditator and bestows it. Also meditating continuously on that form which is all-pervasive will lead to the form itself disappearing. It ends in the worship of the Formless.

A group of pilgrims from Gorakhpur visited Bhagavan once. The leader of the group asked Bhagavan: "You are a *jnani* who says that you are everything, whereas we are *bhaktas* who believe that we are different from the Ultimate. Is there any meeting ground in our divergent ways?" Bhagavan replied, "The words are different but what is happening is the same. As your *nama japa* intensifies, the form disappears and the *nama* alone remains. Until that stage is reached your ideal is the image

you worship. To be able to see that form in everything is a big step forward. At that stage 'everything is full of Vishnu'. The worshipper also is a part of 'everything'. To be able to see Vishnu alone is the next big step. After that a stage arises where there is only *tejas*, beyond that lies the primal sound, beyond that is *akasa*. What lies beyond that and where lies multiplicity can be considered later. You said that the ideal was Vishnu. To be able to see Vishnu *nama* everywhere is the achievement. The *nama* arises in us as a thought. In other words, when you perform *nama japa* in the mind that *nama* is in the form of a thought. To have one and only one thought is the last step. I refer to it as '*aham*'. Names like Vishnu depict characteristics whereas for '*aham*' even that is absent.

Krishna Bhikshu once submitted to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, previously while meditating, your form used to appear before me. But now that is not happening." Bhagavan replied, "At least is the name remembered?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Name is beyond form," declared Bhagavan.

A Vaishnavite asked Bhagavan very reverentially, "Bhagavan, is Truth *dvaita* (dualistic) or *advaita* (non-dualistic)?"

Bhagavan in turn asked, "Do you refer to the present stage or to the stage when the world is not."

"To the present."

"At the moment, you and I are very much here."

"What happens after the world submerges?"

"In what?"

"In *paramatma*."

"After it submerges, there is no world, isn't it? There is only *paramatma.*"

"How do we get that experience?"

"What is your experience in deep sleep? There is no world in it. Were you there alone or as two or three?" asked Bhagavan.

The visitor had no reply.

For some, the chosen deities were *avatara purushas* like Sri Rama. For some others it was Sakti. In such cases the power of Sakti flowed to the *upasaka* and his mind became one with Sakti. That Sakti itself gave strength to the seeker for meditating on the Formless, clarified Bhagavan on one occasion. Bhagavan would suggest appropriate *mantras* for meditation to disciples after finding out their priorities and preferences.

Observe what Bhagavan said to Ganapati Muni regarding the practice of *mantra japa* "In *Upadesa saram* performing *japa* is referred to. In *japa* too there are different ways – performing it aloud, performing it in a low voice or performing it silently in the mind, each better than the preceding method. Keeping the attention on the person performing the *japa* is known as *ajapa*."

In the case of worship of the One with form Bhagavan also, like *acharyas* of the past, approved of *bhakti* and said that uninterrupted meditation was better than meditation in spells.

Bhagavan gave detailed comments about *pranayama* in *Ramana Gita* just as in the *Bhagavad Gita.* Yet Bhagavan

emphasized that whatever be the method adopted what was important was the realization of the Self.

Bhagavan's grace helped each seeker according to his deserts. So far as Bhagavan was concerned, all *sadhana* practices were equally good. What did it matter if the *upadesa* varied according to the disciple?

For practitioners of *yoga*, brilliant lights in different shapes and colours were visible. So also forms of chosen deities were visible and all kinds of sounds were heard. It was common for seekers to see Bhagavan in the form of a brilliant light also.

Santammal, a widow, came from Ramanathapuram to serve Bhagavan. She worshipped Bhagavan's picture with great devotion and always meditated on Bhagavan during waking hours. Naturally, she also saw him in her dreams. Occasionally, she saw Bhagavan's form as a bright light whether her eyes were open or shut and this happened even if she was at Arunachala. She narrated her experiences to Bhagavan who told her that these visions were not important and that only realizing the Self mattered. What we saw in the waking state in gross form could also be seen in a subtle form by the subtle mind in dreams, yet all these were mere objects and not the subject, which was more important. To rejoice at such experiences was utter foolishness emphasized Bhagavan. Similar are occult powers, and *siddhis*, about which we shall speak later.

There is no need to specify what Bhagavan's *upadesa* was. His life story, described so far, itself was his *upadesa* and example. Though Bhagavan was helping devotees in

numerous ways some were still dissatisfied. They aspired to be known as Bhagavan's *sishyas* (disciples) but Bhagavan never gave *diksha* to anyone nor did he accept anyone as his *sishya*. It was enough to obtain his grace and he always assisted devotees in the spiritual path by his presence or a look. Chadwick once asked Bhagavan if he never gave initiation by touch nor accept some as his disciples. Bhagavan replied, "What is the need to demonstrate? Without touch don't you get the feeling of being accepted?" In fact, everyone knew within himself whether he was accepted or not but no one could claim to be Bhagavan's *sishya* or that what they said was Bhagavan's view also.

Devotees would discuss *Ulladu Narpadu* among themselves and interpret its views in various ways but would not come to any agreed interpretation. They then approached Bhagavan for an authentic clarification. Bhagavan heard them and merely said, "Nothing has been written with any *sankalpa*. Your interpretations are alright." Actually, each one understood the verses according to his *samskara* and the benefit derived also depended on their understanding. Even if anything more were to be taught to them it was all of no use to them. On one occasion, two devotees gave different interpretations and not satisfied with it, continued their discussion through the pages of a journal!

It is commonly believed that *upadesa* meant giving a *mantra* or touching the hand or head. Bhagavan usually never did any such thing. Some did experience Bhagavan's appearance in dreams and his touching them. This probably happened because privacy was necessary for any

upadesa. Further any initiation could happen through visions as in the case of Natanananda, or through sight as in the case of Ganapati Muni, or through the touch of the head as in the case of Ramaswami Iyer and a young Maharashtrian woman. From various *bhaktas* we learn that Bhagavan appeared in their dreams and gave *upadesa*.

Any doubts raised about matters in the *sastras* would elicit replies beneficial to everyone. On some occasions even if any request for a clarification was not articulated the clarification came about in a general way.

Bhagavan gave his *upadesa*, on numerous occasions, by means of brief statements. Once, a young girl was moving from one window to another in the hall frequently and every time she moved Bhagavan asked her what she was doing. The girl would reply "Nothing." Thereupon Bhagavan said "That girl knows that only her body moved and that she did not move. Elders never know this."

A devotee once said, "Bhagavan, you don't do anything. Give me your power I will do a lot of good to the world." "Is it so?" And turning to others present Bhagavan continued, "here is a man who has no wherewithal to feed himself but wants to run a charity home!" Bhagavan gave a similar answer to Humphreys.

A gentleman who had a newspaper in his hand asked Bhagavan: "It is said that the *atma* is everywhere but it is seen no-where. Where exactly is it?"

"You have a newspaper, you see the letters there but not the paper. On that account do you say that there is no paper at all?"

While serving food one server spilt something on somebody's feet. Bhagavan noticed it and remarked, "The moment they take the ladle some think that they are great but they don't see who is really great."

A disciple once asked Bhagavan, who was then at Skandasramam, "What is meant by desireless action?" Bhagavan did not give a reply but kept quiet. A little later, he went out for a walk accompanied by the questioner and some others. Bhagavan saw a branch of a tree, cut it and spent one hour shaping it into a nice walking stick. At about that time, an elderly shepherd who had no walking stick came that way walking slowly and with difficulty. Bhagavan gave him the stick which he just made and said "Action is over so also desireless action" and thus showed by example what the phrase meant.

Bhagavan's words were pregnant with *upadesa*. To be able to receive it depended on the hearer.

The example to be followed was Bhagavan's way of life. Whatever he did was perfect and an example for others to follow.

39. Daily Routine

A devotee once asked Bhagavan, "Swami, do you sleep?"
Bhagavan: Am I awake now?

Devotee: Yes, otherwise how can anyone speak?

Bhagavan: If one is awake it means he wakes up from sleep, isn't it?

Another doubt expressed was how could one who had transcended the three states experience deep sleep. The reply was, "It is the body that sleeps and wakes up. The I is always there as a witness."

Venkateswara Sarma once asked, "Bhagavan performs so many acts but says that he is doing nothing. How is this possible?"

Bhagavan: Even if told, can you understand? Think it over.

Bhagavan later continued, "Any action of one whose *ahamkara* has disappeared, is not because of his will. The action is perceived only by others."

In trying to understand the daily routine of Bhagavan the above observations have to be kept in mind. The purpose of this chapter is merely to describe what went on in the Presence, nothing else.

In the early days, when the *Ashram* was small, there was no activity in the *Ashram* in which Bhagavan did not

participate. During those days, Bhagavan would wake up around 2.30 or 3 in the early hours of the day and after ablutions would go to the kitchen to cut the vegetables as did his disciples. He would also prepare the breakfast and the side-dish to go with *iddlis*. Bhagavan always emphasized the dignity of labour and would also teach the art of cooking to disciples. He held that one not well-versed in cooking could not claim to be educated either!

Around 5 A.M. the doors of the hall would be opened and several devotees, about to leave for the various *teerthas* for bath or for *giri pradakshina* would walk in and prostrate before Bhagavan. Vedic scholars would recite from the *Upanishads.*

Some others would sit for meditation. Yet others would recite Muruganar's hymns. During Dhanurmasa (December-January) Andal's '*Tiruppavai*' would be sung. At about 5.30, students of the Vedic school would come and recite *Sri Ramana Chatvarimsat* and *Taittiriya Upanishad*. By that time, lady devotees who had spent the preceding night in the town (as their stay at the *Ashram* during night was forbidden) would arrive.

By 6.30, Bhagavan would go for his bath and later go to the dining hall, where he would be served breakfast. Thereafter, Bhagavan would go towards the hill and *ashramites* would go about attending to their duties. These duties were varied, like collecting flowers from the garden and stringing them into garlands or bringing various items from the storeroom and getting them ready for cooking, or getting down to cooking or attending to the cattle in

the *goshala*. Some went to work in the *Ashram* office or the library. For those in the Vedic schools the duty was to offer worship three times a day at the Matrubhuteswara shrine, and at the images of Skanda, Ganesa or at Bhagavan's picture. On special occasions, special *poojas* were also offered.

By about 8 o' clock, Bhagavan would return to the sofa. Thereafter, devotees, visitors and disciples would assemble there. Usually silent meditation would be carried on. But those who looked upon Bhagavan as God would not keep silent and they would either recite the *stotras* written by them, or just show him their poems. They would also sing songs. Yet others would narrate their domestic problems to him!

Some came to the *Ashram* to indulge in some argumentation and show off their erudition. On such occasions, Bhagavan would usually remain silent and would not speak unless a question was specifically addressed to him. A Theosophist once asked Bhagavan, "They say that Masters (great souls) exist in an invisible form, how is one to see them?"

Bhagavan: How can you see those who are invisible?

Visitor: By *jnana.*

Bhagavan: For a *jnani* there is no 'other.'

An *ashramite* once said to Bhagavan: "You say that the world is an illusion, whereas we don't say so. Is this not the only difference between us?"

Bhagavan: Not at all. All that we say is that the only Truth is the *Atma* and that the world is only *Atma*. By

saying that the World, Self and Easwara are Truth you are apportioning only one-third of the truth to Easwara.

A Christian missionary once asked Bhagavan "Is Easwara a person?"

Bhagavan: Yes, he is the first person, 'Aham.' If you give importance to the world he does not get even the second person but only the third person. According to the Bible, He told Moses, that his name was 'I am' (*Aham asmi*).

There were several occasions when people exceeded their limits in their talk with Bhagavan. Such behaviour was looked upon as a nuisance by those who came to Bhagavan's presence for meditation or self enquiry which were facilitated by his presence and some of them did feel the results straightaway. Yet why did aberrations occur? By the touch of Bhagavan's *sakti* the mind of some visitors got churned and their latent tendencies surfaced. These were imbued with the three *gunas* and showed themselves as irreverent acts.

There were some who were busy with Bhagavan's literary works. Bhagavan would help them in their task. In the early years Bhagavan himself would write the fair copies or correct the proofs. He also would bind books.

Bhagavan's kindness was proverbial. His concern for the downtrodden was phenomenal. His kindness was directly proportionate to the misery of the visitor. Also, his welcoming smile to an infant was warmer than that to a learned scholar. Similarly, his replies to an unlettered person were more illuminating than those to a scholar. His warmth

towards a poor man was greater than that towards a rich one.

Old devotees and those who knew Bhagavan's nature hesitated to go to his presence but this was not the case with new visitors. They went straight to Bhagavan who welcomed them with a smile.

People were forbidden from touching Bhagavan. No such restriction applied to squirrels or doves which sat on his lap. Cows and dogs would be patted by Bhagavan. He would show greater interest in receiving the books, toys or peppermints brought by children than in receiving scholarly works by erudite scholars.

By nine o'clock, Mouni would bring the day's post. Bhagavan would have a look at the letters for about one hour and thereafter till eleven o'clock it was the same routine. By eleven Bhagavan would rise for lunch and till about two o'clock in the afternoon visitors did not disturb him. During this interval Bhagavan would glance through the newspapers or take some rest.

Thereafter, the hall would get filled up as usual. This was the time when philanthropists and poets would talk, *bhaktas* would sing and scholars would begin philosophic discussions. This was also the time when Bhagavan would be absolutely silent. When asked how this was possible he would say, "If you pay attention only to the base note and not to the other notes can the mind become engrossed in the *raga*?" He also would say, "If you pay attention to the Self other objects will not attract you."

Thereafter, he would attend to correspondence. Mouni would keep the replies for letters received ready

and show them to him. Bhagavan would go through them and make corrections wherever deemed necessary.

At about 4.30 p.m. Bhagavan would go out for a walk on Arunachala.

By 5.30 p.m. meditation would commence. It was a moment eagerly looked forward to by disciples. Peace would reign all around. As darkness fell and enveloped Arunachala it would appear as if life itself was being enveloped by ignorance. A little later students of the Vedic school would arrive and recite *Rudram, Purusha-sooktam*, *Srisooktam* and *Upadesa-saram*. Those sonorous notes would touch the foot of the hill. After a silent half an hour, recitation of various writings of Bhagavan would commence. By then the *pooja* at Matrubhuteswara shrine would be over. Thereafter women would have supper and go out of the *Ashram* into the town for the night.

After the night meal by about 8.30 p.m., disciples would gather round Bhagavan. It was a time when everyone was relaxed in Bhagavan's presence. After some time, everyone would depart after *pranams* to Bhagavan. The doors of the hall would then be closed. This was the usual daily routine.

Three days in a year were special. Thousands of visitors thronged the *Ashram* and all of them would be fed – these three were *Krittikai*, Ramana's birthday and the *Mahapooja* day at Matrubhuteswara shrine. *Krittikai* has already been alluded to. Ramana's *jayanti* (birthday) would fall the day after *Ardra darshan*. Celebration of *jayanti* was begun by Gambhiram Seshayya in 1912

when Bhagavan was residing at the Virupaksha cave. Bhagavan did not approve of the proposal and wrote two Tamil verses on the occasion.

1. You who wish to celebrate a birthday, first inquire who was born. One's true birthday is when one enters into the Eternal Being which shines forever without birth or death.

2. Of all days, on one's birthday one should mourn one's fall (into *Samsara*). To celebrate it as a festival is like adorning and glorifying a corpse. To seek one's Self and merge in it is wisdom.

Translation: *Collected works*

But the disciples insisted that the celebration was for their own benefit and was necessary as a mark of their gratitude for Bhagavan's arrival in their midst for their uplift. On their persistence Bhagavan let them have their way. Ever since, Bhagavan's birthday (*jayanti*) is being celebrated with great enthusiasm to this day.

The celebrations, during Bhagavan's time would be on the following lines.

The hall opposite the Matrubhuteswara shrine would be decorated and while the pooja at the shrine commenced Bhagavan would arrive and sit on a couch. Nadaswaram and other musical instruments would be played and *aarti* offered to Bhagavan. Devotees would thereafter prostrate themselves in front of Bhagavan. Around eleven o'clock, poor feeding and a feast for devotees would take place. The poor feeding would go on till about three o'clock in the afternoon. Feeding of

the poor was especially pleasing to the mother enshrined as the Matrubhuteswara.

The other important celebration at the *Ashram* was the *Mahapooja* to commemorate the *samadhi* of the mother.

Whatever was done at the *Ashram* was done as an offering to the Lord who purified the mind and granted liberation. *Ashramites* also believed that all actions should be desireless and that deeds were more important than words. Just as hunger would not be appeased by merely shouting for 'food' even so, in the philosophy. All that was required was unquestioning *sadhana* and everything would come to fruition in the fullness of time – there were no milestones in this philosophic quest. Thus desireless action and constant practice would render daily life sacred and pure.

Bhagavan used to go around the *Ashram* while all inmates were asleep. Perhaps the father wished to protect his children while they were all asleep also!

40. Withdrawal of the Manifestation

ECHAMMAL: It was the evening of December 27, 1945. Bhagavan was enveloped in a bright ethereal light, which could not even be looked at. Normally, such a light enveloped Bhagavan on the *jayanti* and *Mahapooja* days as disciples prostrated before him after the *pooja*. But as it was not one of those days the disciples wondered at the light.

That night, Echammal merged in Bhagavan. Maybe it was for that reason that Bhagavan intensified his lustre. Many people did not even know that Echammal was sick though a few noticed that for about two or three days earlier she had not been fetching food for Bhagavan.

Around ten o'clock, of the next day, Lokamma came to Bhagavan and reported the passing away of Echammal. In a stentorian, emotion-filled voice Bhagavan said, "Yes it is so. I am also looking forward to go but the time has not yet come." Those who heard these words were bewildered. "Was it the beginning of the end? If not, why would Bhagavan utter such words?" they asked themselves.

It was only by the evening that Bhagavan became normal. Only then he enquired how the funeral rites of Echammal were performed. He was told that her body

was cremated. Later her ashes were taken to her place and a *tulsi* plant was planted thereon.

Towards the end of Krishna-*avatara*, Brahma and other deities approached him and said, "The purpose of your *avatara* has been fulfilled, and it is time to think of return to your place." Krishna's reply was, "I have a little job left. I have to help the Yadavas who cannot help themselves." Maybe, Bhagavan also thought it desirable to send those who were close to him to the heavens before he himself departed.

In her last days, Echammal suffered great penury but still did not give up her service of Bhagavan. He used to dissuade her saying, "Formerly we did not have enough to eat but now the situation is much better, why do you not stop this service and have food with us here?" She did not heed his advice and just to satisfy her, Bhagavan would taste a little of what she brought. He would not go towards the dining hall until Echammal's service was over. After her demise, her relations offered to send food to Bhagavan as before but he did not approve of it. The privilege of service was special to Echammal! After her passing away Bhagavan is reported to have said, "I have still the responsibility of Mudaliar patti."

Madhava Swami:

The next person to make his exit was Madhavaswami. Madhavaswami was a very quiet Malayalee who came to Ramanasramam within five or six years of its establishment, from a village near Palghat. He was detailed to attend on Bhagavan. A bachelor, his devotion and attention to Bhagavan

were matchless. Wherever Bhagavan went, Madhavaswami followed him with a bowl of water (*kamandalam*).

Such a devotee surprisingly began experiencing an inexplicable burning sensation all over the body. Possibly his body could not stand the intensity of the power of Bhagavan with whom he came into contact. He then left the *Ashram* in spite of Bhagavan's advice and began wandering about at different places. Yet he could find peace nowhere.

Madhavaswami who was immersed in joy while at the *Ashram* became drowned in sorrow and finally joined a *math* in July 1946 at Kumbakonam. He wished to go back to Aruncahala before his death but hesitated thinking that he would not be allowed to go out again. Just before his death he had an attack of dysentery. Thereafter, he sat in *padmasana* and breathed his last on 7th July 1946. Kunjuswami went from Ramanasramam to perform the funeral rites.

Madhava was a blessed being, almost a shadow of Bhagavan, such being the case, why did he leave Bhagavan? Or, why did he pass away at a different place? There is a belief that the soul of one who served a *siddha purusha* would be attached to the *Mahatma* and that if he left the company of the *Mahatma* the body would not survive long. A parallel to this can be found in the case of Sri Aurobindo's wife who did not go to Pondicherry in spite of being repeatedly asked to do so. She passed away a little after the Master moved to Pondicherry. The power of attraction of *Siddha purushas* is intense. If a body confronts it, it naturally perishes.

Ramanatha Brahmachari:

He came to Bhagavan during the latter's stay at the Virupaksha cave. A bachelor and a very fine person he had a good knowledge of Tamil literature. He was frail, physically unattractive, and utterly poor; his goodness was not discernible easily. He used to perform *pooja* in someone's house in the town and have his food there. As he had no means to buy himself a pair of sandals he would wrap his feet in pieces of gunny sacks while walking in the hot sun. Therefore, his walking was odd. Bhagavan would joke, "Ramanatha, those who watch you walk could comment that you are making fun of the way I walk." He fell ill and went to Madras for treatment where he passed away on December 19, 1946.

Ramanatha was a good poet. His verses entitled *Ramanar anubhuti* and his song *Tiruchuzhinathan kande ne* are excellent. This song contains the substance of a three hour long speech he gave on the similarities of Nataraja of Chidambaram and Bhagavan one evening in Bhagavan's presence. The song says, "I saw the Lord of Tiruchuzhi and unable to come away, stayed back. The same Lord who comes to the succour of the pitiable, dances at Chidambaram. The same Lord stays at Virupaksha cave on Arunachala as an ocean of compassion. He manifested himself there as God." In this song Ramanatha repeatedly refers to Bhagavan as *Andavane* (God) which was why he got a nickname *Andavane*.

Lakshmi:

It was 1948, the next one to leave Bhagavan was Lakshmi the cow. We have already seen the love and

affection Bhagavan showered on the cow. She lived at the *Ashram* for well over twenty years. After a brief illness she had liberation on 18 June 1948. That morning Bhagavan visited the cowshed at about 9.45 and sat close to Lakshmi, and took her head in his lap. He began caressing her body and addressed her in several endearing terms like "Amma", "dear" and "nayana." Sometime in the afternoon Lakshmi breathed her last.

In the evening at about 6.30 her body was brought for funeral in a cart to a place north of the hall where Bhagavan normally sat. In the presence of Bhagavan, Brahmin *pandits* recited various *mantras* while performing *abhisekha*. Bhagavan spoke about Lakshmi in glowing terms. He said that possibly in an earlier birth she was a good *sadhaka* who came to the *Ashram* in the present birth for liberation. "Everything is being done for Lakshmi as was done for mother," he said to someone. Lakshmi's body was smeared with turmeric power and sandal paste, jasmine garlands were placed round her head and a red upper cloth was wrapped round her neck. After waving camphor light in front of her she was interred.

In the South there is a practice of writing an epitaph after the death of a great *sadhu* and getting it engraved on a stone to be placed on the *samadhi*. On the death of Lakshmi, Bhagavan himself wrote an epitaph in Tamil. Therein, Bhagavan referred to Lakshmi as having attainted *mukti*. Because of this a view was expressed that Bhagavan granted liberation to Lakshmi. It was also said that Devaraja Mudaliar had asked Bhagavan himself about this

matter when the latter clarified that *vimukti* meant *mukti*. Bhagavan never denied anything to anyone.

According to the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama granted liberation to Jatayu, the bird. He said, "You will go to those blessed *lokas* to which great, pious souls go, with my blessings." Maybe Lakshmi had a similar journey.

The epitaph reads:

> "On Saturday, the fifth day of *Ani* in the year
> *Sarvadhari*, the twelfth day of the waxing moon
> Under the asterism *Visakha*, the cow Lakshmi attained *mukti*."
>
> – Translation: *Collected Works*.

Bhagavan later translated the verse into Telugu, in the very metre he used in Tamil. Bhagavan introduced this metre (Venba) to the Telugu language.

On the day Lakshmi passed away Bhagavan's body became utterly weak and it was with great difficulty that he could take a few steps.

Mudaliar patti: (Mudaliar granny)

She was born in a Mudaliar family belonging to Injikollai (Thanjavur District). At the suggestion of her *guru* she visited Tiruvannamalai in 1908 on a pilgrimage along with her son and daughter-in-law. They had *darshan* of Bhagavan at Virupaksha cave. Possibly influenced by that *darshan*, Mudaliar granny decided to stay back. Not being able to persuade his mother to return home, her son, Subramanya Mudaliar, left his wife, Kamakshi to look after her and returned. Mudaliar Patti like Echammal, began serving food to Bhagavan. Her son also could not

resist Bhagavan's magnetic pull and got back to Arunachala for Bhagavan's service after some time. Later on, he became a renunciate and became the head of a *math* at Achalapuram, the place where the Saivite Saint Jnana Sambandar disappeared, merging in effulgent light.

Mudaliar granny and her daughter-in-law devoted their lives to the service of Bhagavan. In course of time after her daughter-in-law passed away the granny continued her service in spite of advancing age. Noticing her dedication and helplessness Bhagavan once said, "Anyone helping her can be deemed to be in my service."

Mudaliar granny was very independent and insisted on carrying on the service without anyone else's assistance, she also took liberties with Bhagavan. Once when she served a larger quantity of food than usual Bhagavan expressed his annoyance. Granny turned back and said, "It is all in the mind." Bhagavan had a laugh and remarked "She is throwing back my teaching at me!"

After passing away she was buried in the Gounder compound. The rites were performed as for a *sannyasini*. A large number of people gathered at the burial spot giving evidence of the respect and love she commanded while alive.

Having thus sent away his close associates it appeared as if Bhagavan began the preparations for his own withdrawal. The stories of the departure of only a few devotees have been given above. It does not mean that other devotees were not dear to Bhagavan.

After all, did not Lord Krishna depart leaving behind his very intimate Arjuna and Uddhava?

41. Conclusion of the Mission

AMONG the final acts before Bhagavan's departure the first one was the *Kumbhabbhishekam* (consecration) of Matrubhuteswar shrine. Commenced in 1939, the shrine was very small with just the *samadhi* and a *linga* thereon covered by a thatched roof. This was not satisfactory to many and devotees wished to build a marble shrine in its place. But money, people's cooperation and above all God's will are essential for anything.

Temples always played an important part in Bhagavan's life. Undoubtedly, the temples at Tiruchuzhi. Madurai and Arunachala were centres of his spiritual growth. It was natural for Bhagavan to feel that that *Sakti* which brought him to the spot where the *Ashram* came up should continue to shower blessings on devotees from there. But in the matter of raising money he was very strict and forbade anyone from seeking funds using his name, "I never asked money for myself. Just as the other buildings have been built, let this also come up" he emphasized. All that the disciples wanted was Bhagavan's approval for the proposal. Diverse were the reactions. The *sarvadhikari*, Niranjanananda Swami, was enthusiastic and happy about a temple for the mother. While some devotees

felt that the temple being built in a graveyard would be very powerful and welcomed the proposal as an act of piety towards one who gave birth to Bhagavan, there were a few who questioned the need and propriety of a temple in "modern times." Anyway, cooperation of several people was forthcoming in an abundant measure; money and material poured in.

The images worshipped at the temple are those of Matrubhuteswara (i.e. Easwara who came as Mother) Yogamba, Sri Chakra engraved on a stone at the bottom of which is fixed another Sri Chakra made of gold.

The entire construction took place according to the *agama* sastras under the supervision of a sculptor who was brought from the South. A separate hall to seat Bhagavan was also constructed just in front of the temple. This was because the old hall where Bhagavan sat was getting overcrowded with visitors. In 1946, the Golden Jubilee of Bhagavan's advent at Tiruvannamalai was celebrated grandly. To accommodate the visitors a 'Jubilee Hall' with a thatched roof was erected. Even after the celebrations were over, Bhagavan continued to sit there and grant *darshan* but it was uncomfortable both in the rainy season and hot summer. Niranjanananda Swami felt that a suitable large hall had to be constructed for Bhagavan's use. The place chosen for that was just in front of the temple for Mother. The foundation for the hall was laid on 25 January 1945 and the work commenced on 16 May 1946. It was completed along with the temple. A huge granite 'throne' was also sculpted for Bhagavan to sit.

By February 1949, all the jobs were almost completed and the consecration was fixed for 17 March 1949. In that context the *lingam* etc. which were at another spot were brought and placed at the new place and *abhishekam* of the temple crest was performed according to the procedures prescribed in the sastras. All the rituals were carried out over a period of three days. The Puri Sankaracharya also participated in the function. Though a separate elevated seat was offered to him befitting his status he declined it and sat on the floor over a deer skin near Bhagavan. During his conversation with Bhagavan he asked for a clarification of a particular scriptural saying. After Bhagavan gave the reply, the Sankaracharya repeated that he could still not grasp the point. Thereupon Bhagavan looked at him bestowing his grace for about half an hour. The Sankaracharya shut his eyes and with tears flowing down he bent before Bhagavan and said that he had understood the subject. As the Sri Chakra was to be laid in the shrine and as he was an adept at it, the Sankaracharya himself volunteered to attend to the job.

Bhagavan sat close by and blessed the proceedings. He was later asked to open the new hall. As he did not have enough energy even to open the lock, the sculptor assisted him in doing it. Bhagavan later entered the shrine and blessed the Sri Chakra by touching it. After that, he walked down to the stone 'throne' on which cushions were laid and granted *darshan* to the visitors. On the second day a number of devotees spoke and music concerts were held. The *Kumbhabhishekam* took place

on the 17th morning. All through the time there was great enthusiasm and rejoicing.

Those who observed Bhagavan during those days felt that he was bestowing his auspicious and supernatural powers on the Sri Chakra and others. His physical strength was at a low ebb but the work he embarked on was very arduous. It looked as if he was transferring all his powers to them.

It may not be inappropriate to elaborate about the presiding deity here viz., the Meru Sri Chakra, which is about two feet square with adequate height. Sri Bhagavan spent the night at the spot when it was fixed. He sat there bearing the heat of the furnaces used to melt the metals so that they could be properly fixed. Bhagavan himself placed the gold Sri Chakra beneath the *Meru*.

After the *Kumbhabhishekam* daily *pooja* was being carried out at the shrine. But as no special *poojas* were being performed at the *Meru Chakra* it was felt expedient to do this also. This commenced in 1953. Special *poojas* are performed on six occasions every month such as each Friday and full moon day – They are quite an elaborate affair spread out over some hours.

All the plans for *poojas* were finalized during Bhagavan's presence when an attendant remarked, "How nice it would be if these *poojas* were to be continued forever". Bhagavan assented and asked. "But who would take the trouble?" Sadhu Arunachala (Chadwick) came forward to take the trouble. Everything has since been going on quite regularly. It could be due to the influence of the *poojas*, that all the problems relating to the *Ashram* got slowly resolved.

Books:

After 1945, Bhagavan did not take up any writing. However, he showed interest in revising scattered works of his. He also wrote some minor pieces, which were:

Characteristics of a Siddha: In the Bhagavata there is a part called the *Hamsageeta* (Swan song) where the characteristics of a *siddha* are described. During the course of a conversation in 1946 this piece was brought to Bhagavan's notice. He was gracious enough to give its substance in Tamil and later in Telugu.

Trisulapura Mahatyam: In February 1946, Bhagavan asked Viswanatha Brahmachari to translate this Sanskrit work into Tamil which he later corrected. Trisulapura means Tiruchuzhi.

Paratma Pooja: Adi Sankara wrote two pieces called *Para Pooja* and *Atma Pooja*. Bhagavan combined them and wrote *Paratma Pooja*. This contains the philosophy of *pradakshina*.

There is a story relating to this in the South. It goes like this. Siva had a fruit in his hand which both Vinayaka and Guha wanted. Siva said that the fruit would be given to the one who circumambulated the *lokas* and came back first. Immediately Guha set out on his peacock whereas Vinayaka, the cleverer one, simply did a *pradakshina* of his parents and demanded the fruit. All the *lokas* were in Maheswara and so, a *pradakshina* of Maheswara amounted to the circumambulation of all the *lokas*! Performing circumambulation of Maheswara mentally would amount to *Para Pooja*.

Conversation of Jnaneswara and Vittoba: Manu Subedar was very famous in Maharashtra. He translated into English a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* written in Marathi by Jnaneswar the saint. Manu Subedar once asked Bhagavan, "Almost all books are about *siddhas* but are there any about *sadhakas*?" Bhagavan replied: "In the Tamil work, *Bhakta Vijayam* there is the conversation between a *siddha* and a *sadhaka*, that is the conversation between Vittoba and Jnaneswar." Later Bhagavan got this translated into English and sent it to Manu Subedar. A Telugu translation of this 'Conversation' was done by Suri Nagamma.

Ekam aksharam (One letter): Several people have the habit of asking great people for their autograph or something written on a piece of paper and keeping these with them as precious objects. But when people approached him for any such thing Bhagavan used to avoid writing saying: "What is the name I have? You are referring to me as Ramana. What can I write when I don't have any name?" But on the insistence of Somasundara Swami Bhagavan obliged him by writing a *sloka* which he translated into Telugu, and at Muruganar's request into Sanskrit. This is the verse:

> "The single letter shines forever of its own accord within the Heart. Who can hope to write it?".
>
> – Translation*: Collected Works*

Dipavali (The Festival of Lights): Some devotees wished to collect stray verses of Bhagavan with a view to

publishing them. In this effort they came across an old note-book which contained some verses. Among them were some verses on Dipavali, written by Bhagavan at the request of Muruganar. These are the verses:

> The day that Narayana grinds to death the *naraka*-ego in the quest of knowledge, inquiring whence the *naraka*-I rises to rule the *naraka*-world, that day is the light festival of *Naraka-chaturdasi.*
>
> To search and slay the sinner, the *naraka*-ego corrupted by thought that one is the *naraka*-form, the false body-tenement, and to shine as the true Self, this is Dipavali indeed.
>
> – Translation: *Collected Works*

Manifestation of Dakshinamurti: In an introduction to his Tamil translation of Adi Sankara's *Dakshinamurti Stotra* Bhagavan said:

> Brahma (the Four Faced God) brought into being by his power of thought four sons named Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatsujata and Sanatkumara. He asked them to attend to the work of creating the world, preserving it etc., but they were not interested in it, being completely detached. They wandered about in search of peace and tranquility. As they were very dispassionate and fit (to receive spiritual instruction) Siva, the great God of compassion, manifested himself before them in human form as Dakshinamurti (God facing South) under a banyan tree. He sat silently absorbed in himself, his right hand showing the

> gesture known as *chinmudra*. The four seekers were drawn to him even as iron is drawn to a magnet. They sat before him absorbed like him in the Self. Even advanced spiritual aspirants cannot easily understand this state of silence. The world, the seer and the awareness which enables it to be cognized stand as obstacles in their way. But since it is the single power (*Sakti*) which manifests itself as these three and again withdraws them into itself, everything is that power which is the Self. Sankaracharya has expounded this truth in this hymn.
>
> Translation – *Collected Works*.

This brief note is an example of Bhagavan's capacity for succinct expression. This story is available in *Sivarahasya* (Tamil) under the title 'Manifestation of Dakshinamurti.'

The Heart and the Sahasrara:

During the Virupaksha days Bhagavan and Ganapati Muni were discussing the *Hridaya* (Heart) and *Sahasrara*. A devotee by name Arunachala who was sitting close by wrote the summary of the discussion in English. The same was translated into Tamil by Bhagavan.

Tiruchuzhi:

At the request of Suri Nagamma, Bhagavan translated into Telugu three songs on Tiruchuzhi originally written by him in Tamil.

Ekatma Panchakam:

Again at Nagamma's request Bhagavan wrote *Ekatma Panchakam* in Telugu adopting the Tamil metre, venba.

Later he himself translated it into Tamil. As there was already a composition of Sankaracharya called *Atma Panchakam* Bhagavan decided to call his composition *Ekatma Panchakam.* Here are the verses:

FIVE VERSES ON THE SELF

1. When, forgetting the Self, one thinks
That the body is oneself and goes
Through innumerable births
And in the end remembers and becomes
The Self, know this is only like
Awakening from a dream wherein
One has wandered over all the world.

2. One ever is the Self. To ask oneself
"Who and whereabouts am I?"
Is like the drunken man's enquiring
"Who am I"? and "Where am I"?

3. The body is within the Self. And yet
One thinks one is inside the inert body
Like some spectator who supposes
That the screen on which the film is thrown
Is within the picture.

4. Does an ornament of gold exist
Apart from the gold? Can the body exist
Apart from the Self?
The ignorant one thinks "I am the body",
The enlightened one knows "I am the Self".

5. The Self alone, the Sole Reality
Exists for ever,

If of yore the First of Teachers
Revealed it through unbroken silence
Say who can reveal it in spoken words?

– Tr. K. Swaminathan

Likewise, Bhagavan translated *Arunachala Pancharatna* and the poem about his birthday into Telugu. All these translations are in the venba metre not known to the Telugu language.

A stray verse: Bhagavan put in his own words a particular thought in the Tamil work '*Prabhu Linga-Leela*' thus:

> "As one lets go the leaf after eating the food, the seer sheds his body."
>
> – Translation: *Collected Works*

Vichara Mani Mala:

Sadhu Nischaladas wrote a book in Hindi *Vichara Sagar* which became famous. It was translated both into Tamil and Telugu but as it was a voluminous work Arunachala Mudaliar asked Bhagavan to write an abridged version of the Tamil book which Bhagavan did. This book was published quite long ago but did not bear Bhagavan's name as the author. At the request of some Telugu devotees Bhagavan translated it into Telugu under the title *Vichara Mani Mala*.

42. The Dusk

Much before darkness envelops the earth the rays of the sun are withdrawn and the sun sets to the regret of the world.

During the Virupaksha days, the Skandasramam days and the early years of stay at Ramanasramam Bhagavan's body glowed brilliantly. Later, except on the occasions of *Deepa utsavam, Mahapooja* and Bhagavan's *Jayanti*, that glow disappeared. Several interpretations were put on this; such as that it was an indication of the approaching withdrawal or that in the ruined physical frame of Bhagavan it could not be manifest and the like.

Astrologers said that the end was approaching. The *Nadi grantha* mentioned that Ramana Leela would go on till Bhagavan was eighty. The learned questioned whether the planets had any influence on a *jnani*. Some quoted the saint composer Tyagaraya who said, "If Rama's *anugraha* (grace) is there, what do the *grahas* (planets) matter?" Yet others contradicted this saying, "Bhagavan is totally indifferent towards the body so the influence of planets is bound to be there."

Bhagavan said on a number of occasions, "This (the body) has come into being according to your desire." He meant the devotees' desire. He also added, "It will go if you

do not need it." This meant that Bhagavan's life was entirely dependent on the wishes of others. If that be so, another question could arise – "Who is it that says the body's work is no longer needed?" There can be no answer to it.

Owing to the neglect of the body during its youth it began showing the consequences from 1945 itself. With the passing away of Echammal (1945) the consequences became clearer. Even earlier, Bhagavan had *asthma* and pains in the joints during winter. Therefore, he avoided sweets and buttermilk sometimes. While it can be philosophised that nobody lasts for ever, it can still be argued that if there was a reason for the body's coming into being there should be one for its exit also.

In the present case, it would be more appropriate to say that the purpose of the *avatar* had been fulfilled. As Kavyakantha said in *Ramana Gita,* the purpose was to demonstrate to the world that abidance in the Self and Liberation were attainable. Bhagavan demonstrated this for over half a century. Seekers came from far to serve at the feet of Bhagavan and his message had travelled to distant lands. His grace was experienced by devotees, *yogis, jnanis* and disciples according to their deserts. "Anyone who came here did not go empty-handed."

"Bhagavan takes upon himself the fruits of devotees' *karma*, which is why he suffers so many bodily ailments" – who can answer such comments? It is possible that Bhagavan took upon himself the sufferings of the devotees. A devotee by name Krishnamurthy was suffering from a painful index finger but sat silently in Bhagavan's presence without revealing

it. All of a sudden Bhagavan began rubbing his own index finger. The next moment the devotee's pain disappeared.

Ever since 1947, Bhagavan's deteriorating health became a cause of anxiety to his devotees. His rheumatic pain extended to his waist and back. Maybe, for a weakening body better nutritious food was necessary but Bhagavan did not approve of any special treatment for himself. On top of it he would say: "The body itself is a disease. One should enquire into the origin of the disease, not look for ways to lessen the effect of the disease which this disease (the body) contracted." Thus he would make fun of those who brought medicines for him.

Ramachandra Rao, an Ayurvedic physician from Bangalore, once brought a list of items for preparing Ayurvedic medicines and showed it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan went through the list and spoke well of each item. Taking the cue, Ramachandra Rao asked Bhagavan, "Do I have Bhagavan's permission to go ahead with the preparation of the medicines?"

Bhagavan: Medicines? For whom?
Ramachandra: For Bhagavan
Bhagavan: Why for me? I am alright. You appear to be weaker than me, you had better take the medicine yourself.

Another devotee also suggested that Bhagavan should take tonics. Bhagavan replied, "Am I a rich man to be able to afford tonics? All that I do is to go in when the bell rings and eat the food granted to me."

Another devotee said to Bhagavan, "Sri Aurobindo has milk, fruits and almonds," (implying that Bhagavan also should do something on those lines). Bhagavan's reply was "Why not? He is fairly well-to-do. What do I have?"

Bhagavan was always the first one to serve devotees who fell sick. He was capable of curing their diseases in a moment by his grace but it was the misfortune of the devotees that he never thought of curing himself so that hundreds of devotees could continue to experience his grace.

The authorities of the *Ashram* never asked Bhagavan to cure himself for their sake. But they fetched doctors who gave medicines, and performed surgery on the body as if it were like any other body. By the time they realized the truth it was too late.

On several earlier occasions Bhagavan cured himself of ailments such as jaundice. On that occasion, the medication of doctors did not prove effective. So also when he had unceasing hiccups. Once Bhagavan had eczema both on the legs and back. Dr. Melkote tried several medicines for two months but failed. Finally with tear-filled eyes and a choked voice he begged of Bhagavan to cure himself. Within two days Bhagavan cured himself. Is not Bhagavan a physician for the disease called the cycle of birth and death (*bhavaroga bhishak vara*)?

May be it did not strike the devotees that towards Bhagavan's end the only way of keeping him amidst themselves was to surrender to Bhagavan.

In February 1949, a small 'boil' appeared on the left forearm of Bhagavan which he ignored. But the doctors

did not; they felt that unless it was removed at once surgically it could cause trouble. On the evening of 9 February 1949, Dr. Sankara Rao, with the assistance of Dr. Srinivasa Rao, removed the boil in the bathroom of Bhagavan. Before the surgery Bhagavan did ask, "Won't this go by simply bandaging with a few leaves?" But the doctors said, "The *sarvadhikari* also has approved of our proposal." Thereafter, Bhagavan kept quiet. After a week's bandaging the wound healed and the bandage was removed.

The boil re-appeared and within a month increased in size causing anxiety to everyone. This time a noted surgeon, Dr. Raghavachari from Madras was summoned. He operated on the tumour on 27 March 1949 after giving a local anaesthetic. As the tumour arose on the nerve a deep cut became necessary. A biopsy was done and sent for investigation. The wound did not heal, on the contrary it spread. The results of the biopsy arrived by mid-April. It was diagnoised as sarcoma. Radium treatment was then resorted to. The tumour did not heal but it began bleeding. A blood transfusion was done on 30 April. Finally Dr. Raghavachari suggested amputation of the forearm which Bhagavan rejected outright saying, "I will look after myself." On another occasion, he quipped: "If the tumour were to arise on the head they would perhaps suggest removal of the head." Devotees who could not bear the thought of Bhagavan's forearm being removed drew hope from his assurance that he would look after himself.

On 8 May 1949, a well-known Ayurvedic physician, Dr. Lakshmipathi, suggested that bandaging with certain

leaves would be beneficial. Another doctor of Bangalore, Dr. Ramachandra Rao also made a similar suggestion. Hearing this, a devotee wondered if the problem could be so easily solved. But Bhagavan said, "He is a doctor, he should know." Yet again someone suggested that Bhagavan could cure himself by his *sankalpa* to which Bhagavan replied "Did I invite it for it to vanish at my bidding?"

Possibly as a result of Dr. Lakshmipathi's suggestion Valluvai Tata, a native 'doctor' who knew all about medicinal leaves, was summoned on 5 July 1949. This was the same person who had healed Bhagavan's fractured collar bone while on Arunachala. He tied a particular bandage saying a tumour like that ought not to have been operated. This bandage reduced the bleeding. But the 'doctor' was keen on removing the 'poison' in the tumour and applied hot chilli powder to the wound. Even under normal circumstances such an application would be unbearable to anyone, in Bhagavan's condition it was intolerable. His temperature shot up. With that the native 'doctor' was asked to stop his attempts.

On 25 July 1949 another well-known physician Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar visited Bhagavan and expressed displeasure at the carrying out of the operation. He suggested administering certain injections and left promising to visit again.

Meanwhile several Vedic pandits commenced some special *poojas* and *Surya namaskars* for Bhagavan's recovery. Some devotees like Suri Nagamma also joined them. Bhagavan did not prevent them but said, "Let them do

what they wish, after all it is something good." He also said on another occasion, "What is the use? The *atma* in Surya is here also."

In August, administering of penicillin injections commenced. The timings for Bhagavan's *darshan* were also restricted as he needed rest. In November, Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar paid another visit and after consulting the doctors decided that another operation was necessary. Bhagavan was taken to the *Ashram* dispensary the following day. A blood transfusion was done and after administering anaesthesia the tumour was cut with an electric knife to minimize bleeding.

Anxious crowds collected round the *Ashram* dispensary. To keep some order, volunteers and police were deployed. At the request of Swami Niranjanananda the crowds began dispersing. In the evening after 6 p.m. Bhagavan was seated in the verandah of the hospital to grant *darshan* to the devotees.

The next day, Bhagavan himself walked to the hall to give *darshan*. The hopes of the doctors were restored. Radium therapy was resumed and it appeared as if the wound was healing. But in December things took a turn for the worse with the appearance of another tumour a little above the place where the earlier tumour arose. The doctors operated this also on December 19 but with no results.

Thereupon the doctors gave up. The anxiety of the devotees mounted and they began asking themselves whether the *jyoti* would last beyond a few days.

43. The Sun Sets

"Do you think that Sri Krishna (who brought back to life several dead people) will not be able to protect himself?"
– *Bhagavata* (11th Skanda)

PEOPLE lost all hope in the efficacy of allopathic medicine. As an alternative they invited T.S. Iyer a homoeopath whose treatment at first resulted in some improvement. Bhagavan was shifted from the hospital to the small room opposite the *darshan* hall, where he resumed granting *darshan* sitting in the verandah of the room. Veda *parayana* also commenced.

Jayanti came off on 5 January 1950 but the joy associated with it was absent.

In the middle of February another tumour showed up just below the place where the previous one was. Dr. Raghavachari and others said that it was also malignant brushing aside the homoeopath's view. So homoeopathy was discontinued and an Ayurvedic physician Dr. Moos from Kerala was summoned. He also tried his hand but with no success. The tumour began growing and Bhagavan became weaker and more anaemic.

Yet Bhagavan's face never lost its lustre, seeing which some theorized that as *jnanis* did not have any attachment for the body Bhagavan was unaware of the pain of the

body. *Vasishtam* says, "It makes no difference to a *jnani* whether sandal paste is applied to the body or a limb is severed." Still some others said that as Bhagavan never complained of pain he could not have had any. Another comment was that by the power of his *tapas* Bhagavan ensured that he had no pain at all. All these comments were based partly on philosophy and partly on illusion.

The symptoms of pain such as lack of sleep were noticed by several people. Bhagavan was also heard groaning in pain. It is as absurd to say that the body of a *jnani* did not have any pain as to say that no blood would spill if his body is cut. No individuality is left, therefore, even if the body suffered there would be no individual to experience that. The body is made up of the five elements and suffers its pain. Those who identify the *jnani's* body with the *jnani* are bound to say that he also suffers pain.

What we should focus on is how the body's pain was being borne. Though we say apparently that Ramana's body was different from Ramana's *jiva* we are unable to conceive that the person known as Ramana was absorbed in Brahman. On this basis therefore the extraordinary tolerance Ramana showed was unique to him. Or it could be that Bhagavan might have felt that if he were to show his suffering his devotees would not be able to bear it. As far as possible he resisted showing any sign of his pain and his body continued to play its role as usual to the extent feasible. He would take his bath as usual before sunrise and at the appointed hours both in the forenoon and afternoon he would read the letters of the *Ashram*.

He gave *darshan* to devotees and supervised the publication of books. But after January the body could not do even this. Gradually he lost all energy to grant *darshan* outside the small room as a result of which devotees would walk past the room where he lay and had *darshan*.

Even by March-end there was no improvement and it was decided, with Bhagavan's approval, to invite an Ayurvedic doctor (Kaviraj) from Calcutta. The Kaviraj gave treatment for some days and after suitably instructing a local ayurvedic physician, returned to Calcutta. But this physician felt that the medicines were too powerful for him to administer. He wanted the assistance of another physician from Calcutta. Bhagavan could not tolerate this anymore and declined to take any medicine after 12 April. Meanwhile, he had an attack of *asthma* and when one of his relatives attempted to give some medicines Bhagavan prevented him saying "Why bother? Everything will be over in two days." Everyone drew hope believing that Bhagavan had decided to cure himself. But what they could not guess was that what was to depart was not only the disease.

On 13 April Mesha *sankramanam* (transit of the sun into Aries) took place. On 14th, the doctors could not guess that there would be any immediate danger. Also, the Government doctor who came from Vellore, saw Bhagavan at about 6 p.m. and reiterated that there was no immediate danger. People were asked to go to have their supper. The Government doctor pleaded with Bhagavan to have some orange juice. Bhagavan declined

it at first but seeing the sorrow on the doctor's face agreed to have a few sips. He took just two spoonfuls.

At eight o'clock Bhagavan wanted to be kept in the sitting posture and this was done by propping him against the pillows. A little later his breathing became difficult. Dr. Krishnaswami wanted to give oxygen but Bhagavan declined it. Half an hour passed this way during which Bhagavan could breathe through his mouth with great difficulty. Outside, the devotees began reciting *Aksharamanamalai* with the refrain "Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva. . ." A few tear drops trickled from his eyes on listening to it.

Later the dreaded moment arrived. Bhagavan opened his mouth to breathe, the mouth remained like that, the breath stopped and Bhagavan shed his mortal coil. It was Friday night, 8-47 p.m. The devotees outside kept singing *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva*. Arunachala hill reverberated with that sacred name; at that very moment a brilliant shooting star traced its way across the skies towards Arunachala. People in distant places saw its appearance. Ramana *Jyoti* left its temporary abode, the earth, and returned to its natural place of stay.

Witnessing the bright light people in the town suspected the worst and rushed to the *Ashram*. Their father, guide, *guru* and their all was no longer there. He had left his body.

The *Ashram* resounded with the wails of the assembled people. Bhagavan's disciples seated him in the *padmasana* posture and brought him to the *darshan* hall for public

viewing. After the initial emotional outburst subsided, devotees sat near the body and began singing devotional hymns and songs. The body was smeared with sandal paste and *vibhuti* and decorated with flowers

The next day amidst the chanting of Vedic *mantras* the holy body was bathed in holy waters, milk and honey; a huge crowd witnessed it. A little later the body was decorated and lowered into a pit dug between the Matrubhuteswara shrine and the old *darshan* hall. The pit was filled with salt, camphor, and other aromatic substances.

There were hundreds of people in the *Ashram* that evening – all that they experienced was desolation, the mind was benumbed. "In your absence this world now resembles a dilapidated house," said a poet. How true!

On Bhagavan's advent on the earth there was a light seen only by a blind lady. He departed in a blazing trail of light seen by hundreds of people. That night the stars in the firmament shone with a new brilliance; the sky was a clear blue, and utterly still. The darkness was frightening. The heart became forlorn.

44. *Quo Vadis?*

WHERE did that light go? What happened to it? For some devotees Ramana was nothing less than the attributeless Brahman.

Once a devotee named Amritanatha wrote on a paper a Malayalam verse imploring Bhagavan to say whether he was Hari (Vishnu) or Satguru (Subrahmanya) or Yathiswara (Siva) or Vararuchi. Bhagavan wrote his reply in the same Malayalam metre thus:

> In the recesses of the lotus-shaped hearts of all, beginning with Vishnu there shines as pure intellect (absolute consciousness) the Paramathman, who is the same as Arunachala Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart wherein He dwells as the beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as pure consciousness.
>
> – Translation: *Collected Works*

This was hardly a reply to Amritanatha's question; it was merely a philosophic *upadesa*. The purpose was to teach the disciple who wished to know the nature of the Guru that the Guru himself was God who was Paramathma, a source of bliss. What Amritanatha wanted

to know was who among those embodied celestials Ramana was. But Bhagavan's reply amounted to saying: "Leave alone that question. Try to know my nature, Ramana's nature, and be done with it."

Likewise, for some devotees Ramana was just a *jnani*. A *jnani* is Brahman, nothing else. From a *jnani's* body the *jiva* does not go out, it just merges in its source. These people also repeat Ramana's words, "Where can I go? I am here." But there is little scope for interpreting these words as referring to the state after physical death. Further, for one who has attained Brahman there is nothing like here or there. Therefore to interpret that Ramana continued to stay at the *Ashram* would be absurd.

Those who have seen a *jnani's* last moments say that a *jnani's* body remains as if in deep sleep with the sense organs being still, the eyes and mouth being closed. But in the case of Bhagavan the mouth was not closed. Could not the *prana* have gone out through the mouth?

Lastly, at the last moment of Bhagavan a brilliant light shot across the skies in the north-eastern direction which was seen by thousands. What was it other than Ramana *jyoti*?

The Bhagavata describes the end of Lord Krishna thus: The path which the Lord traversed across the skies as a lightning could not be understood even by Brahma and other celestials. Lord Krishna after some time disappeared into his natural abode. Because of this description of the movement of Krishna one cannot say that Krishna was not Easwara or that he did not have

any natural abode. In Bhagavan's case also there was a brilliant light which had its path.

Some say that as Bhagavan had no latent tendencies which alone caused birth on the earth he no longer would reappear on the earth. Actually, Bhagavan himself said a number of times that his relationship with his devotees was unbreakable and that he would always be of help to them. Unless Bhagavan was a celestial with a body how would this be feasible?

As Kavyakantha said, Bhagavan was an aspect of Skanda and he possibly returned to his natural abode. Skanda also left in the form of a light. In saying so, one is not in anyway minimizing the grandeur of Bhagavan's experience of the *Atma*. Bhagavan himself said that though Siva and others were *jnanis*, they had to carry out some activities assuming a form.

There are several points in favour of the statement that Bhagavan was an aspect of Skanda. On 21 November 1945, the *utsava vigraha* of Arunachaleswara went round the hill and when it reached Ramanasramam gate, Bhagavan was sitting on a platform near the water tap close to the book-depot. The plate containing the Deity's *prasadam, vibhuti* was brought to Bhagavan who took some *vibhuti* and said with great reverence, "The son is subservient to the Father."

Much before this incident occurred Kavyakantha mentioned in the *Ramana Gita* that Bhagavan had earlier appeared as Kumarila Bhatta and as Jnana Sambandar. Kavyakantha also said that Ramana was the embodied form

of the celestial Skanda and was a part of the line of *acharyas* like Narada and Sanatkumara who appeared on the earth to impart wisdom to people whenever *dharma* was on the decline.

In this context one may recall a conversation which a devotee had in 1934 with Bhagavan. During the course of the conversation Bhagavan pointed out that the devotee was mistaking him to be only the body and also revealed that he lived "simultaneously in twenty *lokas* in twenty bodies. The bodies keep coming and going. Who is to keep track of which body is coming or which is going? The important thing is to abide in the Self and not to observe the changes in the bodies."

This entire discussion has been necessitated because some described Ramana as having had Brahma *nirvana* or *Mahanirvana* (the word '*nirvana*' seems to be owing to Buddhist influence). Some other devotees say that Ramana continues to be Skanda and that he listens to our prayers. This could be so.

Even if they are in their respective *lokas*, *devatas* possess all powers and depending on the intensity of a *bhakta's* prayers can appear anytime. At *Sivasakti kshetras*, which are places of deliverance, it is easy to invoke them and feel their presence. This also explains why Siva's offspring, Ramana, may have taken *Sivakshetras* like Tiruchuzhi, Madurai and Arunachala as the field of his sport. As an aspect of Skanda he exited in the form of a light and made Arunachala his abode. It is therefore, easy to invoke him at Arunachala – this is not to say that this cannot be done

at other places but this depends almost entirely on the strength of the prayers of devotees. On the other hand, at Arunachala, owing to the favourableness of the *kshetra* it becomes easier. This is especially true of the spot of Ramanasramam where Ramana spent over two decades. Bhagavan Ramana's sanctitiy was enveloped by the physical body composed of the five elements, that is now buried at Ramanasramam. Even now the vibrations which were experienced during Bhagavan's lifetime can be felt there. A moment's *dhyana* at Ramana *samadhi* or in the meditation hall can make one experience Bhagavan's force even now. That current of peace still flows there. It is also the place where the dust of Bhagavan's feet is available and is it not enough if that dust envelops us? So also this is the place where the dust of the feet of Ramana *bhaktas* is available which again is sacred. The Ramana *teertha* owes its origin to Ramana himself. This is the air Bhagavan breathed. This is the sky which reflected in his heart. Like Krishna at Mathura, Bhagavan Ramana is very close here.

45. What next?

WHAT next? Bhagavan once said, "So long as Swami is there, nothing will happen. Later, voices will be raised."

Bhagavan's demise became unbearable for several *bhaktas* most of whom left within a couple of days. Ramanasramam, then resembled Ayodhya after Rama's departure, or a Vedic *mantapa* where the sacred fires had been extinguished.

With the passage of time, the sorrow abated. Krishna Bhikshu attended the first *aradhana* but could not stay beyond a few hours. Even that short time was spent in shedding tears – it was as if past memories expressed themselves as tears. He concluded that he could no longer visit the *Ashram* and for the next three years, he did not do so. But this could not last forever. Bhagavan would not allow one to be away forever. One who became a prey of Arunachala could never pull back. Arunachala would devour him.

After Bhagavan's *nirvana* the problems relating to the running of the *Ashram* increased manifold. It was to avoid complications in this matter that Bhagavan had got a will prepared under the supervision of Justice Sundaram Chettiar. According to the will, *poojas* have to be offered to images in the Matrubhuteswara shrine. The *Ashram*

should be developed as a spiritual centre first under the supervision of Niranjanananda Swami and later under the supervision of Venkataraman and subsequently the members of the family. This last condition was not acceptable to some and they began creating problems even during Niranjanananda Swami's time but by Bhagavan's grace all the problems got resolved.

Unable to handle the management single-handedly, Niranjanananda Swami formed a Managing Committee with himself as life-President and carried on the management according to the advice of the Committee.

The activities of the *Ashram* such as running the cowshed, guest house, *Veda-pathasaala*, the *poojas* of Matrubhuteswara, Yogamba and Srichakra were carried out as usual with Chadwick assuming responsibility for the *Veda-pathasaala* and the *poojas*. A sub-committee was constituted to ensure publication of books – mostly Bhagavan's works as well as *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* (M. Venkataramaiah), diaries of Devaraja Mudaliar (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*) and S.S. Cohen. The aim of the *Ashram* was to publish all the works of Bhagavan.

Even the daily routine was kept up as before and this included the various *poojas* and *Veda-parayana* at prescribed timings.

During Bhagavan's time, Niranjanananda Swami would seek his advice on any problem and hence did not feel running the *Ashram* burdensome, but now the situation changed. Further, at that time visitors who came to have Bhagavan's *darshan* donated liberally. But later their numbers

as well as the donations gradually declined. Not only that, some came as friends ready to help but in course of time became hostile and turned foes. Yet others attempted to alter the arrangement of hereditary management. Yet Chinnaswami tried hard to carry out the management by surrendering himself to Bhagavan. His health was impaired and he lay sick for several months in the *Ashram* hospital. He kept his peace looking at Bhagavan's photographs hanging in the room all around. It was that *Mahatma's* power that looked after him all the time.

Meanwhile, another blow struck Chinnaswami. His younger sister, Alamelu who brought up his mother-less son, Venkataraman and saw through his wedding, fell grievously ill. Much earlier in 1938 Chinnaswami had summoned Venkataraman to assist him in the *Ashram* work. Alamelu and her husband Pitchu Iyer, unable to leave the boy whom they were bringing up as their own son, moved to Arunachala and assisted at the *Ashram*. As there was a regulation that women could not stay in the *Ashram* premises, after nightfall a separate house had to be hired for their stay beyond the *Ashram* premises. After some years, Pitchu Iyer was able to build a house in a locality called Ramana Nagar. He had generous help from Bhagavan's devotees to build the house.

Alamelu who was Venkataraman's aunt came to be known as 'aunt' by all the *ashramites*. She was usually quiet, non-interfering and sweet-tempered. She had a profound devotion for Bhagavan and when he was ill pleaded with him with tears in her eyes that he should

cure himself. Bhagavan said to her: "Don't be sorry, my dear. What is to happen will happen. You leave your cares to me and be peaceful."

After Bhagavan's *niryana* her health deteriorated and she was confined to bed for six months. On 3 January 1953 she breathed her last with Bhagavan's *nama* on her lips. There was an extraordinary glow on her face at the time of her expiry.

The passing away of his sister was a great blow to Chinnaswami. With an aching heart he thought he had had enough of the world and begged of his Lord, Ramana, to take him away. As his end approached on 29 January 1953, he summoned his son Venkataraman, other family members and close associates and gave his last message to Venkataraman:

> My conscience is clear, my hands unsoiled. I had never used *Ashram* funds for myself and everything in the *Ashram* belongs to Bhagavan. Preserve it carefully and utilize it wisely. Dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to the service of Bhagavan. By doing so, you will earn his grace in abundance. Let *sraddha*, faith and truth become inalienable parts of yourself. Uphold our tradition in the conduct of the *Ashram* affairs. I have toiled to uphold them.

Chinnaswami became the *sarvadhikari* of the *Ashram* in 1930. Until be became the *sarvadhikari* many outsiders did not even know who he was, he was so self-effacing. He conducted the affairs of the *Ashram* for twenty two years.

Upon his passing away, Vedic *mantras* were chanted and the entire *Ashram* reverberated with them. In the coconut grove opposite Matrubhuteswara shrine a *Samadhi* was erected for him. He did not select this spot but the choice would have pleased him immensely.

He was a very amiable person, but was prone to get angry at the slightest provocation. He believed in wielding the rod to correct errant persons. He possibly was not learned but it could be that he sought liberation through service to Bhagavan and his *bhaktas* – a service which was unremitting and unsparing. The only *yoga* he knew was that of *seva* and perhaps his only faith was that through *seva* he would earn Bhagavan's grace. As his concern for the *Ashram* was uncompromising some people perhaps did not appreciate him. He would not hesitate even to disturb devotees from their *dhyana* for *Ashram* purposes. And he was meticulous in accounting for money.

It was because of his dedication that quite a number of buildings and facilities came to be provided at the *Ashram*, which enabled devotees to worship Bhagavan without any difficulty.

Standing monuments of his activities are the acquisition and establishment of Sundara Mandiram at Tiruchuzhi and Ramana Mandiram at Madurai. After Chinnaswami, his son Venkataraman took over as the President of the Board of Trustees.

46. Some Anecdotes

1. No photograph of Bhagavan as a child is available. Young Venkataraman was once photographed with his uncle. For that photograph he was asked to place his hand on a big book as if he was very studious. Suddenly a fly landed on his face to drive away which he lifted his hand. It was at that very moment that the photographer clicked the camera. Naturally, the photo was no good; even that could not be traced anywhere. The first photograph of Bhagavan now available was taken in or about 1900 at Virupaksha cave by a devotee from Kumbakonam, Nalla Pillai.

2. Here is another anecdote narrated by Bhagavan: An old, lame man of Arunachala wished to leave his family in disgust and began walking with the help of a stick. He took the *giri pradakshina* road to leave the town. He had earlier performed the *pradakshina* several times but as he was about to leave the town, he felt very sorry. Suddenly a Brahmin youth appeared from nowhere and took away the stick from the old man saying: "Do you need this still?" and disappeared. From that moment the old man became normal. At the time of this story Bhagavan was on the hill but he never said that it was he who set right the old man's foot. A similar story can be found in *Arunachala Purana*.

3. A European devotee set out to explore the Arunachala hill all by himself without any guide. As he did not return even by late evening, people at the *Ashram* became anxious. Bhagavan was at that time sitting near *Ramana Teertham* and looking at Arunachala with a pair of binoculars. A little after dusk the devotee returned, exhausted and narrated that while on the hill he had lost his way and that Bhagavan had guided him back to the *Ashram*. Everyone was astonished to hear this and wondered how Bhagavan who was in the *Ashram* all the time could have guided the devotee.

4. Rudraraj Pandey, Principal of a College at Khatmandu, visited the Arunachaleswara temple to have the *darshan* of the Lord. He took the help of a guide at the temple. As they neared the sanctum sanctorum the guide began chanting aloud "Arunachala." Pandey wanted to have the *darshan* of the *linga* but all that he could see was the pleasant, smiling countenance of Bhagavan all over the place. Overwhelmed, Pandey shed tears of joy.

5. A devotee once sought Bhagavan's permission to take to *sannyasa* as he was no longer able to face the problems of family life. Bhagavan advised him against it but the devotee persisted saying, "You came away but you say that we should not." Bhagavan replied "When I came, I did not seek anyone's permission". At this, the assembled people broke into laughter.

6. Bhagavan had a fine sense of humour and his comments were polished, never hurting anybody. When the pain in his joints became pronounced, not only his

attendants but even some devotees took part in massaging his legs. A seventy year old retired judge also wished to do the same. When Bhagavan asked him the reason he said "Let me earn some *punya,*" Bhagavan then said, "All of you please be quiet for some time. I also wish to earn some *punya* massaging these legs," and actually began doing so.

7. An *asthma* patient requested Bhagavan to grant him relief from the ailment. Bhagavan said, "I also have the same problem; at least you have a Swami to whom you can appeal, what about me? I see no Swami. One has to accept whatever befalls him."

8. A youth once asked Bhagavan to tell him the "way to *moksha*". Bhagavan replied, "Go back along the same way as you have come." The youth did not grasp the meaning and sat disappointed. Others present clarified the matter for him thus, "What Bhagavan says is correct. First of all arose the I-thought and thereafter other thoughts, that is the mind, arose. To enquire into the source of all thoughts is what is meant by 'going the same way as you have come'."

9. Behind the *darshan* hall there was a mango tree. Instead of climbing the tree to pluck its fruits some people were using long sticks to beat it and in the process a number of leaves and twigs also fell down. At that moment Bhagavan happened to pass that way and he admonished them, "Enough, enough. In return for the fruit it gives we are destroying the tree. Quite a nice thing to do. Please go away."

Similarly, Echammal once wished to perform a *vrata* of a "hundred thousand leaves." But she could not collect the required number of leaves and she told Bhagavan about it. Bhagavan suggested that she pinch her body instead and fill up the gap. Echammal could not follow and asked "What is that?"

Bhagavan: If you pinch your body you feel the pain but you think that by plucking the leaves the plant does not feel any pain.

10. A well dressed man walked into the hall even without leaving his footwear outside and asked Bhagavan, "Have you seen God?" Bhagavan put on an innocent face and asked "God? Who is he?" The young man was dumbfounded, while everyone else laughed. A little later he asked Bhagavan if he could take a photograph of Bhagavan. "Yes, if it is possible," said Bhagavan. (The youth could not understand the import of this.) What Bhagavan meant was that he was the *atma* and that it was impossible to photograph it. Yet the youth clicked his camera and went his way.

11. Bhagavan once heard from somebody that a *yogi* observed in his subtle body how far the aura of *Mahatmas* spread. In that process he claimed to have seen the *aura* of the Buddha spread over a mile, Sri Aurobindo's seven furlongs whereas Bhagavan's went over three miles but still continued going. As a result, he could not see the end. After hearing the story Bhagavan said, "If only he enquired into what his subtle body was, all these problems would have been solved."

12. During his stay at Virupaksha cave Bhagavan used to take a myrobalan (*Karakkai*, in Telugu) every day as a preventive for constipation. At one point of time all the myrobalans in the *ashram* were over and Palaniswami was planning to go to the town to fetch them. Just then a villager came to the *ashram* with a bag-full of those fruits and offered them to Bhagavan. It so happened that as the villager set out to have Bhagavan's *darshan* by his cart, some myrobalans began leaking from a bag placed in another cart which was moving just ahead of him. The villager picked them up thinking they would be useful for Bhagavan. He reached the *ashram* just as Palaniswami was setting out. Similarly, on another occasion, Palani was about to get some grapes for Bhagavan when Bhagavan said to him, "What is the hurry?" Just then the brother of Seshayya came with a packet of grapes and offered them to Bhagavan. He did so as a matter of courtesy not because he knew that the *ashram* did not have grapes just then. Bhagavan's attendant Ayyaswami used to say that whatever be the requirements of Bhagavan they used to be met in time without any effort.

13. Sundaresa Iyer who belonged to Tiruvannamalai came to Bhagavan quite early in his life. Much later he had to take up a job at a different place but was reluctant to leave Bhagavan. He went to Bhagavan and wept. Bhagavan asked him, "How long have you been with me?" Sundaresa Iyer replied, "Forty years".

"Look," said Bhagavan addressing everybody in the hall. "He has been with me for forty years listening to me.

Yet he says he cannot go to a place where I am not." Bhagavan possibly meant that there was no such place.

14. Bhagavan resolved the difficulties of his devotees and of those who sought refuge in him. Sundaresa Iyer had to write the foreword for a collection of Bhagavan's Tamil works about to be published. He concluded the foreword saying, "It is believed that those who read these works will be blessed." Bhagavan corrected this, removing the expression 'believed' and said, "Those who read these works will be blessed."

15. To Sivaprakasam Pillai, Bhagavan said, "One who has the grace of the *Guru* will surely attain liberation, the *Guru* will never forsake him. A *sishya* coming to a *guru* is like something that falls in the jaws of a tiger."

To a Dutch devotee, Hartez, Bhagavan said, "Even if you leave Bhagavan, he won't leave you." Someone immediately asked Bhagavan, "Is this special to him or does it apply to all."

"It applies to all," came the reply.

Bhagavan said to Kitty, Osborne's daughter, "If Kitty thinks of Bhagavan, Bhagavan also thinks of Kitty."

16. A disciple once lamented, "If you do not take pity on me what can I do? There is no sinner like me."

Bhagavan: What is the connection between me and you?

Disciple: You are my *Gurudeva*.

Bhagavan: You say I am your *Gurudeva* but have you given me any *guru-dakshina*?

Disciple: I have always been ready to make an offering but Bhagavan had never been ready

to accept it. Please let me know what I should offer.

Bhagavan: Are you sure you will not back out?

Disciple: How can you say so, will I ever break a promise?

Bhagavan: You gift me the fruits of all your meritorious acts (*punya*).

Disciple: Why not? But I have no *punya* to my credit.

Bhagavan: Give me whatever *punya* you have.

Disciple: I hereby gift all the fruits of my *punya* to Ramana.

Bhagavan: You said that you could give only a little, why not gift that which you have in abundance?

Disciple: I shall do so. But let me know what I can give.

Bhagavan: I will, but you must not back out.

Disciple: Never, I shall never back out.

Bhagavan: If so, give me all your sins.

Disciple: Oh Bhagavan! I have committed innumerable sins.

Bhagavan: I am not concerned with that. Will you give or not?

With great anguish the disciple said, "I gift all my sins and their fruits to Ramana as ordered by him. I have nothing to do with them any more."

Bhagavan: Now see, you have neither merit nor demerit any more. As you are the *Atma* you

don't have to grieve any more. Simply be, do nothing.

17. To another devotee Bhagavan said, "Even if you go to hell I shall follow you. But my question is why should you do acts that could lead you to hell?"

18. Another devotee said to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, so long as we are in your presence we are all good people but once we return to our place we resume our usual activities. I have been coming here for so many years now but I do not seem to have progressed even a little bit."

Bhagavan: Those who travel by first class inform the guard of the train where they have to get down and ask him to wake them up. Thereafter they shut the windows and go to sleep. Do they wake up midway and ask themselves whether they had crossed their destination already? You are all like first class passengers. You have informed the guard about your destination. Does not the guard know what to do? When your destination arrives the guard himself will come and wake you up.

Can there be a greater reassurance than this?

47. Some Light Moments

TO illustrate that *prarabdha* could not be overcome Bhagavan once narrated one of his experiences which was as follows:

A number of devotees and disciples would offer food stuffs and eatables to Bhagavan and insist on his eating them. He had to do so though he did not like to do so. He would often say, "Only I know the problems associated with being a Swami. If you are not hungry, you need not eat but if I didn't eat nobody else would eat. So I have to eat whether I am hungry or not." Once Bhagavan felt that it would be good if he were to go away all by himself so that he could fast at least that day. So he quietly walked towards the forest at the foot of Arunachala. On the way he came across seven women who came to collect firewood in the forest. One of them had had Bhagavan's *darshan* earlier and so could easily recognise him and immediately on doing so offered some eatables to Bhagavan and requested him to partake of them. So did the other women. Bhagavan had no choice but to partake of the food, and thus had his fill. The women did not leave him with that but insisted that Bhagavan should have his lunch with them. To avoid that prospect Bhagavan walked deep into

the forest but around lunch time the women appeared there also. It was summer, and everyone was thirsty. They asked Bhagavan if there was any source of water close by. He had to guide them towards the *Sona-teertha*. Once again the women served him various items of food. Bhagavan was baffled that his own plan of fasting that day had been foiled. After the meal he began his return journey to the *Ashram* and walked along the *giri pradakshina* road. Quite strangely, Ramaswamy Iyer was waiting for Bhagavan at a *mantapa* on the road to offer him some mango juice. Bhagavan had to accept that also.

Some other incidents of the same type were:

In the early days of his arrival at Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan stayed at the Gopura Subrahmanya shrine for a short time. A tall, well-built devotee of Bhagavan used to visit him every day and silently sit in his presence. Bhagavan as usual was always silent. The devotee, Iyer, had great affection for Bhagavan. Once, Iyer arranged a lunch at his house and wanted Bhagavan also to be one of the guests. At lunch time he asked Bhagavan to accompany him to his house but Bhagavan declined. Iyer and another equally well-built person approached Bhagavan to bodily lift him and take him. Seeing that, Bhagavan himself got up and went with them.

On another occasion, Bhagavan and Palaniswami returned to the temple at about 8'o clock in the night after their *giri pradakshina*. Palani left for fetching food. At that time the head of the Easanya *math* arrived there along with his disciples, surrounded Bhagavan and requested him to go to the *math* for supper. Bhagavan

declined but the head of the *math* asked his devotees to lift Bhagavan, which Bhagavan did not like. He walked along with them and outside the temple, a cart was waiting for them. Bhagavan was again forced to get into the cart and taken to the *math* for supper.

Once during the Virupaksha days, Bhagavan, Palani and another person began going along a path towards the western forest. On the way a Harijan woman who was there to collect leaves and twigs saw Bhagavan and began upbraiding him. "Why can you not sit quietly at some place and meditate? Why do you have to roam about here and there like us who have to go around to collect firewood?" After saying this she left the place. Bhagavan remarked "She has taught us a good lesson in philosophy!"

One new moon day some orthodox Brahmins came to have Bhagavan's *darshan* in the morning. They wished to go and perform the rite – *tarpanam* after the *darshan*. Bhagavan asked them to stay back for breakfast where *uppuma* was to be served. Not being able to decline Bhagavan's invitation, the Brahmins stayed for breakfast. After breakfast was over, Bhagavan read out aloud an article detailing the good that onion could do to us and then asked them, "Did you notice any onion in today's *uppuma*?" The orthodox Brahmins could not answer. Then Bhagavan said, "If onion is cut into fine pieces and fried in castor-oil the pungent smell will disappear." Bhagavan's *upadesa* was that mere adherence to customs was not important and that they were meant only as aids to *sadhana*.

A devotee once sat in a corner sulking. He was abusing Bhagavan within himself that Bhagavan was not helping him in any manner. At that very moment Bhagavan said to another devotee, "If you want, abuse only a decent man; if you abuse a rough one, he may beat you up." The devotee who heard this became restless and ran towards Bhagavan and asked, "Does Bhagavan also react to abuse or praise?" Bhagavan consoled the devotee, "No, but if you have to abuse someone abuse only the Swami. If you abuse a good person he may feel hurt and you will suffer on that account. Not so the Swami who does not mind being abused." The devotee felt quite bad at this.

During *giri pradakshina* an interesting event occurred.

Once a devotee took up the chanting of *Tiruppugazh* which contained hymns in praise of Lord Subrahmanya. In one of the lines the expression *Valli Kavalene* occurred, which meant Protector of Valli. The devotee was so overcome by devotion that he began repeating the word "*Kavalene*." In his emotional state he forgot the Tamil meaning (Protector) of the word and somehow switched on to its Telugu meaning which is "I want." Not only that, he kept on saying, "*Laddu Kavalene,*" "*Vada kavalene,*" (meaning "I want *laddu*", "I want *vada*") and repeated various eatables in the process. Those accompanying him burst into laughter whereupon he came to his senses. By the time the party reached the next *mantapa* by a coincidence various devotees brought the very same items and served the party. Everyone was wonder-struck at this coincidence. When the Lord and Source of all treasure was close by all that the

devotee could ask for were some eatables and he got what he asked for. How can one escape one's *prarabdha*?

Bhagavan had a keen sense of humour. During his stay at Virupaksha cave a north-Indian came to have his *darshan.* There was no one else there except Bhagavan who was working on a mud wall. The visitor took him to be a labourer and asked him "Who is the Swami here?" Bhagavan said "He has gone out." After waiting for some time the visitor left. On the following day also the same thing happened. As he was on his way back, Echammal saw him and getting to know what had happened, took him back to the cave. After the visitor had spent some time with Bhagavan and left, Echammal asked Bhagavan whether it was fair to play a trick on the visitor. Bhagavan said, "Do you want me to go about with a piece of paper bearing the legend 'I am the Swami' or do you want me to get the words painted on my forehead?" Quite true. For one who cannot see even with eyes open everyone is an ordinary human being.

Bhagavan's forbearance was limitless. In 1906 during his Virupaksha days Bhagavan came down the hill and after walking around for quite sometime began his return journey by a new route. On the way there was a hornets' nest on a bush which Bhagavan did not notice. His left thigh brushed against the nest and before he could proceed any further a group of hornets came and attacked his left thigh. The Swami felt that as the thigh had committed the fault, it had to bear the consequences and kept quiet without attempting to drive away the hornets. He bore the pain and moved along only after the attack ceased. The thigh was badly hurt.

Once as Bhagavan was going along a path by the side of a stream on the northern part of the hill he suddenly saw a large banyan leaf, the size of a plantain leaf good enough to serve as a plate. His curiosity aroused, Bhagavan proceeded to investigate where the leaf came from. After great trouble he saw a very large boulder upon which the banyan tree was perched. It was a mystery how such a tree could grow there. After that incident Bhagavan ceased roaming about the hill and also dissuaded anyone from trying to carry out a similar exploration.

According to legend the *siddha purusha*, Arunagiri Siddha, sat below a banyan tree on the northern side of Arunachala. Possibly the tree Bhagavan noticed was that very one and possibly also in the *kali-yuga* even a sage of the eminence of Bhagavan could not see the *siddha purusha*.

In spite of Bhagavan's instructions a devotee, Thomas, proceeded to explore that very place. After reaching a particular spot he could neither proceed further nor turn back. He regretted his folly and prayed to Bhagavan, who ensured his safe return.

Bhagavan's *upadesa* to his mother was that destiny could never be overcome try as we might. He did not give the *upadesa* to his mother just to get over the situation he faced at that time but it was something which he believed in. When the time came one had to go through whatever was destined.

One day, Bhagavan accompanied by Vasudeva Sastry and some others, walked across to Pachaiamman Kovil for a bath. They were returning by a shorter route. It was

ten o'clock in the morning and the sun was beating down fiercely. Bhagavan was tired and by the time the party reached a spot called the 'tortoise rock' where a huge boulder lay, Bhagavan had an experience which, in his own words was as follows:

> Suddenly the view of the natural scenery in front of me disappeared and a bright white curtain was drawn across the line of my vision and shut out the view of nature. I could distinctly see the gradual process. At one stage I could see a part of the prospect of nature yet clear, and the rest being covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in the stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When it cleared, I walked on. When darkness and faintness overtook me a second time, I leaned against a rock until it cleared. And again for the third time I felt it safest to sit, so I sat near the rock. Then the bright white curtain had completely shut out my vision, my head was swimming and my blood circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death-like hue – and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva Sastry took me in fact to be dead, held me in his embrace and began to weep aloud and lament my death. His body was shivering, I could at that time distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering, hear his lamentation and understand the meaning. I also saw the discoloration of my skin and I felt the stoppage of my heart beat and respiration, and the increased chillness of the extremities of my body.

> Yet my usual current of "thought" (*dhyana* or *sahaja Samadhi*) was continuing as usual in that state also. I was not afraid in the least nor felt any sadness at the condition of my body – I had closed my eyes as soon as I sat near the rock in my usual posture but was not leaning against it. The body which had no circulation nor respiration maintained that position still. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body, circulation revived with enormous force, as also respiration; and there was perspiration all over the body at every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes, got up and said, 'Let us go.' We reached Virupaksha cave without further trouble. That was the only occasion on which both my blood circulation and respiration stopped.
>
> – from *Self-Realisation*

Bhagavan also clarified that he did not bring the state upon himself voluntarily to see what it would be like if one died. Occasionally he had such experiences but on that occasion it was quite pronounced.

A rich devotee once said that he had been visiting Bhagavan for over ten years but could notice no spiritual improvement in himself.

> Bhagavan: A first class passenger wishing to go to Kasi would ask the guard to wake him up when the train reached Kasi and then would go to sleep pulling down all shutters. Suppose he wakes up at the middle

of the night and keeps lamenting that he might already have crossed Kasi would you describe him as being intelligent? His business was to inform the guard, would not the guard look after his duty?

The devotee usually travelled by first class, Bhagavan was the guard. The devotee wished to reach *Mokshapuri* (City of Liberation-Kasi). Would not the guard take care of the situation, why should the devotee have any doubt?

Bhagavan's replies to questions were usually sweet, occasionally they were critically humorous. A devotee once insisted that Bhagavan should grant him *moksha* at once.

"What is *moksha*?" asked Bhagavan.

"I have to be absolutely happy with no thought of the world or its suffering."

"If so, go to bed and sleep – you will have no thought of the world," replied Bhagavan.

A visitor who belonged to Tiruvannamalai, came and invited all devotees present in the hall to dinner at his house. Bhagavan thereupon questioned him, "Why did you not invite me?" While everyone laughed, the visitor had no answer to give. Bhagavan saw his plight and said, "Go, where am I not?" and recited the sloka *"Aham Vaisvanaro bhutva. . ."* The reassurance of Bhagavan was a matter of great grace to the visitor. Bhagavan himself once said, "No one goes back empty-handed having come here. The non-believer becomes a believer, the believer becomes a devotee, the devotee becomes knowledgeable, the knowledgeable one becomes a *jnani*."

Can there by any greater reassurance?

48. Miracles

While B.V. Narasimhaswami sat in Bhagavan's presence and was translating *Vivekananda's Life and Teachings* into Tamil he wondered if Bhagavan had the power to bestow the experience of Reality by his mere touch just as Sri Ramakrishna had. Before he could express his thought, Echammal came and asked Bhagavan whether occult powers could be obtained by all people.

As a reply to both of them, Bhagavan quoted verse 35 of *Ulladu Narpadu* (*Reality in Forty Verses*):

> To discern and abide in the ever present Reality is true attainment. All other attainments are like powers enjoyed in a dream. When the sleeper wakes, are they real? Those who stay in the state of Truth, having cast off the unreal – will they ever be deluded?
>
> – Tr. K. Swaminathan

Bhagavan's main *upadesa* was that to realize Reality and abide in it was the sum total of all powers and that one should not be distracted by those temporary powers which accrued on the way.

Bhagavan also said that if one was destined, occult powers would be obtained. The Maharshi also would quote verse 15 of *Supplement to Reality in Forty Verses*:

> Not realizing that they themselves are moved by Energy not their own, some fools are busy seeking miraculous powers. Their antics are like the boast of the cripple who said to his friends 'If you raise me to my feet, these enemies are nothing before me.'
>
> – K. Swaminathan

Bhagavan's disciples also are generally of this view. Yet some of them say, "Bhagavan is an *avatar* of Skanda, he is a *jnani* hence he also has all occult powers." For ordinary people *siddhis* mattered most. This chapter has been devised to show the difference in the view points of Bhagavan's devotees and others.

Another point about these miracles is that not everyone who came to visit Bhagavan experienced them and to conclude therefore that they could not be true would be erroneous. After all, the experiences depended on the *prarabdha* of the devotees.

It was said that during his stay on the hill Bhagavan was reputed to be capable of speaking the language of animals and of understanding their mind. Apart from that, Bhagavan would speak to his new visitors in the language native to them and often would clear their doubts directly or indirectly even before they articulated them.

Natanananda's brother once thought of Bhagavan, "They say that he has the spark of Easwara, if so why can't he read my thoughts and clarify my doubts regarding the nature of the *atma*." Normally Bhagavan who never spoke without being asked, took the initiative and explained the nature of the *atma* to him.

Both Seshadri Swami and Bhagavan had a soft corner for Kulumani Narayana Sastry. He wished to show his prose rendering in Sanskrit of Valmiki's *Ramayana* to Bhagavan and set out on that mission. Not wishing to go empty-handed he bought a bunch of bananas and as he had to pass by a temple on his way to Bhagavan he offered one banana to Ganapati purely mentally and took it also to Bhagavan and gave the entire bunch to him. Someone at the *ashram* was about to keep the bunch inside when Bhagavan said to him, "Wait a bit. Let him take out the fruit offered to Ganapati."

Before Sastry could begin talking about his *Ramayana* Bhagavan said, "Why not take out your *Ramayana* and read it out?"

For some years, Gopala Pillai, a Police Inspector, helped in collecting donations for the *jayanti* celebrations; as he was transferred the devotees felt discouraged and they went and complained to Bhagavan: "Last year we were able to cook ten bags of rice, it looks as if we will not be able to have even one bag." Bhagavan heard that and kept quiet. That day, at midnight, someone knocked at the *Ashram* gate and when it was opened they noticed that two cart loads of food materials were brought for the *Ashram*. The philanthropist did not reveal his name but simply said that he had vowed to give the donation and left.

This kind of a thing happened many times. On several occasions whenever the store-room was empty, the fact would be mentioned to Bhagavan and miraculously, the deficiency would be rectified.

A number of persons wishing to know their future, would ask Bhagavan about it. But he never would give a reply – but there could be no doubt that he knew the shape of things to come.

Some Hindi-speaking people who had settled in Fiji visited Bhagavan and complained to him, “Bhagavan, your biography is available in several languages but not in Hindi.” Bhagavan said, “The author of the Hindi biography is now coming with it.” At that time there was no inkling of the author, Venkateswara Sarma, coming there. But he did arrive with his translation within minutes of Bhagavan’s saying so.

While at Yerravada jail Mahatma Gandhi commenced his fast, many were concerned about his health and his very survival. One of them read this news in the papers and became agitated. Observing him, Bhagavan asked him what the matter was. He wailed, “Gandhi may no longer be amidst us. Who is to guide us?” Bhagavan smiled and remarked, “Is it so?” To the devotee this remark came as an elixir. What happened later is history.

By his benign look Bhagavan rid devotees of their ailments – as we saw in the cases of Ramaswamy Iyer and Echammal. Here is another instance.

Griddalur Satyanarayana Rao developed cancer along the inner wall of his alimentary canal which made it difficult for him even to swallow water. No medicine could be administered either. His relatives mentioned that to Bhagavan who went to look him up. The patient sat up and said to Bhagavan, “You may take me to be a sinner

alright but both my mother and brother are true devotees of yours, won't you save me at least for their sake?" He seized Bhagavan's hand and placed it on his heart. Bhagavan made him lie down and kept looking at his heart for about four minutes and left. That night the patient vomitted lumps of flesh and blood as if someone performed surgery inside. The next day he was able to take medicines as well as food.

Bhagavan's words had a great force. Once an intoxicated young man walked into the hall shouting '*Aham Brahmasmi*.' Bhagavan watched and kept quiet for some time but the shouting was causing disturbance to those meditating. Bhagavan said softly to him 'Be quiet.' With that, the young man simply lost all power of speech. Many people were cured of diseases with the *vibhuti* taken from the *Ashram*.

One night, when food was got ready for twenty people suddenly another twenty arrived for dinner. Santamma who worked in the kitchen went and appealed to Bhagavan. Strangely, the food was sufficient for all of them.

In 1905, Bhagavan stayed at Pachaiamman Kovil. The stay was arranged by a devotee, Rangaswami Iyengar. The latter went out to answer a call of nature and just about then a leopard arrived there. He tried to frighten the leopard but it growled. He was terrified and chanting Ramana's name began running for life. Normally, a leopard would not leave such a person but it kept quiet. Bhagavan arrived near that place and asked the devotee to show him

the leopard. But it was no longer to be seen there. Such could be the power of *Ramana nama smarana*.

Another incident occurred at Pachaiamman Kovil. A devotee who had arrived from Madras went out to bathe at a tank close by. Bhagavan who was talking to some visitors in the *kovil,* suddenly got up and went out. By that time a tiger was looking at the new person near the tank, maybe for a meal! At Bhagavan's behest the tiger went back to the forest. The visitor was thus saved.

Bhagavan appeared as a column of light to some. Both Sivaprakasam Pillai and Ganapati Muni had unusual visions as we have already seen. Here is another such instance.

One Raghavachari was an overseer at Tiruvannamalai from 1910 onwards. He had Bhagavan's *darshan* off and on but whenever he went, Bhagavan would be amidst a group of people and so Raghavachari was reluctant to speak to Bhagavan who was not alone. Here is what happened once, in his own words:

> One day, I went up with an intent to submit three questions or requests to Bhagavan. The questions were: (i) Can you grant me a few minutes for a private personal talk-free from the presence of others? (ii) I should like to have your opinion on the Theosophical society of which I am a member; (iii) Will you please enable me to see your real form if I am eligible to see it?
>
> When I went and prostrated (to Bhagavan) and sat, there was a crowd of thirty persons, but (on their

own) they immediately dispersed. So I was alone with him and my first query was thus answered without my having to state it. That struck me as noteworthy.

Then he asked me of his own accord if the book in my hand was the *Gita* and if I was a member of the T.S. and remarked even before I attempted to answer his queries, 'It is doing good work.' I answered his questions in the affirmative.

My second question also being thus anticipated, I waited with an eager mind for the third answer. After half an hour I said 'Just as Arjuna wished to see the form of Sri Krishna and asked for *darshan* I wish to have a *darshan* of your real form, if I am eligible.' He was then seated on the pial with a picture of Dakshinamurthy painted on the wall next to him. He silently gazed on as usual and I gazed into his eyes. Then his body and also the picture of Dakshinamurthy disappeared from my view. There was only empty space without even a wall, before my eyes. Then a whitish cloud in the outline of the Maharshi and of Dakshinamurthy, formed before my eyes. Gradually the outline (with silvery lines) of these figures appeared. Then eyes, nose etc., and other details were outlined in lightning-like lines. These gradually broadened till the whole figure of the Swami and Dakshinamurthy became ablaze with very strong and unendurable light. I closed my eyes in consequence. I waited a few minutes and then

saw him and Dakshinamurthy in the usual form. I prostrated and came away. For a month thereafter I did not dare go near him, so great was the impression the above experience made on me. After a month, I went up and saw him in front of Skandasramam. I told him 'I had put to you a question a month ago and I had this experience' and narrated the above experience to him. I requested him to explain it. Then, after a pause he said 'You wanted to see my form. You saw my disappearance. I am formless. So that experience might be the real truth. The further visions may be according to your own conceptions derived from the study of *Bhagavad Gita*. But Ganapati Sastry had a similar experience and you may consult him.' I did not in fact consult Sastri.

– Extracted from Narasimha Swami's *Self Realisation*

Readers would have guessed by now that Bhagavan had occult powers just like *siddha purushas*. Bhagavan himself once said that he moved in different *lokas* simultaneously and that he lived in different forms in the different *lokas*.

Once Bhagavan revealed that *Arunagiri* had a vast interior in which even an army battalion could stay and that several *yogis* performed *tapas* there. This was something no ordinary mortal could say.

Bhagavan's act of grace in appearing to Ganapati Muni at Tiruvottiyur has already been described. Here is one more instance of the same type.

Amritanatha, one of the questioners in *Ramana Gita*, had been to Haridwar once. He and his friend, Sankarananda, were performing *tapas* at the Turiya *ashram*. During a conversation Sankarananda remarked that after Vidyaranya there were no more *siddhas* and *jnanis* in the country. Amritanatha disagreed with this and cited the instance of Bhagavan as a complete *siddha* and *jnani*. But Sankarananda did not accept it. Thereupon Amritanatha said, "You are a devotee of Kartikeya, and we think that Bhagavan is an *avatar* of Kartikeya. Here is a picture of Bhagavan. You may sit in front of it and perform Kartikeya *japa* for some time. If you do not experience Bhagavan's grace by then, I am prepared to agree with you."

Taking up the challenge Sankarananda performed Kartikeya *japa* for half an hour each day. Four days passed. On the fifth day at dusk when Sankarananda was at his *japa* a great light entered Bhagavan's picture and said to him, "You are not performing the *japa* in the proper way." "What is the proper way?" Sankarananda asked.

"You have to perform *pooja* and *dhyana* of the image in Kadhirkamam of Ceylon:" said Ramana in the picture. Sankarananda said, "I have never been to Kadhirkamam, what does that image look like?"

"Here it is," said the picture and placed the image in front of Sankarananda. He then began watching the image with one eye and Ramana's picture with the other. Suddenly a lizard fell on his lap and he was distracted. When he turned to look at the image and Ramana neither of them was there. He ran out and made enquiries of

some labourers who were working outside the cottage. They said that nobody had either entered the cottage or left it all the while. By then Amritanatha arrived. Sankarananda asked him, "Is there any difference between your Swami and the picture?" The reply was "There is grey hair to mark out the forehead and the rest is dark."

Sankarananda immediately set out for Arunachala and after an eventful journey of some months reached Arunachala and met Bhagavan at Skandasramam. Immediately on seeing him Bhagavan asked him in Malayalam, "Aren't you coming from Haridwar?" Sankarananda was stunned. The person he saw at Haridwar was Ramana. But everyone said – "Ramana never left this place."

Sankarananda authored the *Ramanashtakam*, stayed at Parrot cave for two months and served Bhagavan. He also wrote *Sri Ramanaashtotharasata Namavali* and the method of performing Ramana *japa* and submitted them to Bhagavan along with five slokas. As the climate of Arunachala did not suit him he went back to Uttara Kasi.

The miracles which would take place in the presence of Bhagavan were legion. Here are a few examples.

On a *Jayanti* day a golden-hued mongoose went up the hill like the rest of the devotees, everyone was watching its movements in amazement. The mongoose first went to Virupaksha cave, saw Palaniswami there and moved about like a long-time friend, inspected the cave and not finding Bhagavan there walked up to Skandasramam. The mongoose passed by the people and went close to Bhagavan. After he caressed it, the mongoose sat on his lap for some time and went inside the *ashram* and came

out. During meal time the mongoose walked up and down gravely as if inspecting everything. It did not partake of any food but after a while moved out in the southern direction of the hill but not down the hill.

On one occasion when Bhagavan was coming down the hill to go on a *giri-pradakshina,* suddenly he experienced that the sky was waist-high and that the stars were revolving round him. On another occasion, while on a *giri pradakshina* at Gautama *Ashrama* Bhagavan experienced six stars going round the hill one after another. Similarly on another occasion of *giri-pradakshina* a brilliant light enveloped Bhagavan's party of about fifteen persons and stayed that way for a few minutes and disappeared. This was seen by everyone.

While Bhagavan and his party were resting at the Adi Annamalai temple on one occasion somebody reciting the Sama Veda was heard. But nobody, not even Bhagavan, saw the singer.

Some devotees of Bhagavan said to him: "Bhagavan, you often say that the Heart is on the right side of the chest but we do not experience it." Bhagavan invited them to touch his Heart on the right side of the chest. Each one felt three palpitations and an interval thereafter. They also felt a new energy surging in them.

Ashramites had innumerable experiences of Bhagavan's miracles, even in relatively minor matters. But Bhagavan would be totally unconcerned about them all.

49. The Nature of the *Avatar*

MODERNISTS do not have faith in the existence of a heaven, or a hell and the like; they expect proof of everything.

An advocate from Madurai once asked Bhagavan if there were *devatas* and *bhutas* really.

Bhagavan: Yes. Yet their *lokas* like our own are only relative truths.

Advocate: So, are Siva and others not mere imaginary figures but real?

Bhagavan: Surely.

Advocate: If they are also similar to us, it means that they also suffer the consequences of deluge (*pralaya*).

Bhagavan: It is not like that. If even you can become a *jnani*, a liberated person, and Brahman they, who are much more intelligent, can surely become the immortal Brahman.

We have already noticed that Ganapati Muni emphatically asserted in the *Ramana Gita* that Bhagavan was an *avatar* of Skanda. Who is Skanda? What does an *avatar* mean?

Easwara loves all life and he becomes embodied, through *maya*, for the benefit of living beings. He also assumes certain divine forms for the benefit of people or for specific purposes.

One of those forms is known as Skanda. He is the presiding deity of all weapons and the concealed power of the *mantras* connected with them. In *Chandogya Upanishad* he is referred to as Sanatkumara. He is worshipped as Kumara, Subrahmanya, or as Senani (Commander). He is an ocean of wisdom capable of rendering asunder all attachments, he is the *guru*. The theory is that such a universal *guru* appeared as Ramana to impart *jnana* by his teachings to humanity.

The expression *'avatara'* means the descent in human form of an aspect of Easwara for a certain specified purpose. There are different types of *avatars*.

Even we have a divine spark but unless it is specifically noticed we cannot claim to be *avatars*. By constant *tapas* a person may, step by step, come to express some aspect of the divine. Such persons remain only as *tapasvins* but do not become *avatars*. If the power of Easwara expresses itself explosively on its own in all the five sheaths suddenly, only then is an *avatar* said to manifest itself.

Different deities, like Siva, assume human form for discharging specific purposes. Rama and others appeared to eliminate the *asuric* forces and to impart *jnana*. Siva is said to be the cause of dissolution (*laya karaka*) and physically causes the deluge but inherently he is the one who destroys the *manas* (*manolaya karaka*) which in turn destroys individuality.

His son Kumara is the presiding deity of all the *mantras* of weapons and is the personification of *jnana*, he is the *guru*. Siva's form as *guru* is known as Dakshinamurti which can also be referred to as Skandamurti. Ramana is a *guru* of that type, come to impart *jnana*.

Ordinary *yogis* cannot survive the vision of the embodied Brahman. Both Chaitanya, an *avatara* of Krishna and Sri Ramakrishna lost control over the physical body on the appearance of the Light. If the state beyond it enters the body it cannot survive. It is said by some that it was because of this that Yagnavalkya dissuaded his spouse Gargi from seeking what should not be sought. Bhagavan did not lose control of his body or mind; such a thing would be impossible had he not been an *avatar*.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa clarified that the feeling of unity with Brahman cannot be experienced except in the *nirvikalpa Samadhi* state and that the body cannot last beyond twenty one days in the *nirvakalpa samadhi* state. A study of the lives of *yogis* also shows that the body does not last long in the *nirvikalpa samadhi* state. Hence on that ground also Ramana has to be considered an *avatara*.

By saying that the Maharshi is an *avatara* of Skanda nothing is lost; it does not in any way detract from his greatness. But it behoves us to explain the nature of the *guru* to the extent possible. Inference and evidence are the standards by which proof is to be adduced.

i. Right from his young days Ramana, even when he did not know who Easwara was, had the cognition of Arunachala.

ii. He obtained *jnana* not from *tapas* nor did he have it by birth. He got it, like divine beings, by mere *smarana*. No other *yogi* has obtained it in such a manner.

iii. It is difficult for ordinary *yogis* to transcend the three states – awakened, dream and deep sleep – and enter the *turiya* state. While it is possible in a state of *samadhi* to have a *sakshatkara* of the embodied Brahman it is difficult in the *nirvikalpa samadhi* to reach the state where there is no difference between the seer and seen. That is the *sahaja* state and to abide in it is impossible. Nobody among Hindus, has any doubt about Lord Krishna in this respect. No Hindu who is a believer contradicts the belief that he lived in the *'So'ham'* state right till his physical body dropped off. Krishna was an *avatara purusha* and such capacity could accrue only to an *avatara* and not to anyone else. Bhagavan Ramana also carried out daily activities in the same *so'ham* state throughout. How could it be possible if he had not been an *avatara*?

iv. Even Sankara could not obtain *jnana* without the backing of *mantropadesa.* Only Ramana obtained *jnana* without any such thing. This is prohibited except for *avatara purushas* according to the *sastras*.

Evidence to show that Ramana is an *avatara* of Skanda:

1. In March 1908, Bhagavan was at Pachaiamman Kovil along with Ganapati Muni. One early morning the latter saw a bright light appear and touch Bhagavan's forehead. Ganapati Muni also noticed that within the effulgent light enveloping Bhagavan, six stars of different

colours got merged. Kumara had six mothers who collectively are known as Krittikka.

2. Raghavachari's experience: Bhagavan appeared in the form of Dakshinamurti to Raghavachari. The nature of both Dakshinamurti and Kumaraswami is the same.

3. Bhagavan appeared in the form of a crystal to Sivaprakasam Pillai and a crystal relates to Siva's nature.

4. In Echammal's dreams at Kandukur a form appeared which was identified as that of Skanda. Later when she actually saw Bhagavan, she noticed that the form which appeared in her dreams was Bhagavan himself.

5. Right from his early days, Bhagavan had the feeling that Arunachala was his father. Until he actually came to Tiruvannamalai he did not know whether it was a hill or a cave.

6. Sankarananda Bharati was a devotee of Skanda. Bhagavan showered on him great grace. Several people who perform *japa* of the Skanda *mantra* while thinking of Bhagavan obtain very beneficial results. Similarly in the Ramana *ashtottara* Bhagavan is looked upon as Skanda and worshipped. Beneficial results follow.

7. Ganapati Muni had great occult powers – all of which will be evident from *Vasishta Vaibhavam*. Ganapati Muni emphatically asserted that he, by his occult powers, saw Bhagavan as Skanda. His assertion cannot be brushed aside.

8. Even Bhagavan said in 1912 that 'he was the child that came second' would this not immediately refer to Kumara (who came after Ganesa?)

9. The physiognomy of Dandayudhapani at Palani resembled Bhagavan's form very closely. And were not the image sculptors proficient in the *agama sastras*?

10. On 26 December 1941 one Alamelammal, arrived at the *Ashram* from Madras. She received a letter from her friend, Chengalvaraya Pillai, stating that he had vowed to go to Tiruttani to perform *abhishekam* of milk, to the deity there. Alamelammal showed that letter to Bhagavan who asked: "Is he going there for performing *abhishekam* and not coming here?" She could not follow the question and hence kept quiet. Bhagavan repeated his remark adding, "It is alright" and returned the letter to her. As she was going back Bhagavan said, "That Swami has come here."

According to the Saiva tradition Jnana Sambandar was an incarnation of Kumara this was expressed in his songs as well. Appar and other Saivite saints accepted that. If it was contended that Bhagavan was an incarnation of Sambandar then it followed that he could be the incarnation of Kumara also.

In 1913, Ganapati Muni propounded his theory that Bhagavan was an incarnation of Jnana Sambandar on the following grounds:

1. Sambandar had a *darshan* of the *Jyoti* in his sixteenth year and shed his mortal coil at that very age. Ramana had illumination at about that age (sixteen) and commenced his mission. In other words, Ramana took up where Sambandar left off.

2. Sambandar was full of devotion. Ramana's experience started at that point (i.e. devotion) and

culminated in *jnana* – after all, *jnana* was the final shape of *bhakti*.

3. Sambandar and his entourage merged in Light, Ramana too was enveloped in Light.

4. Ramana's appearance while Sambandar's songs were being sung in his presence was unique and provided sufficient evidence on their affinity.

5. Ramana had formal education only up to matriculation which was inadequate for one to write poetry. But Sambandar was a great poet. Ramana belonged to this heritage.

6. The spot at which Ramana beheld the light at the Arayaninallur temple was the very spot at which Sambandar had the *darshan* of Arunachaleswara (as Light). This was narrated by Ramana to Kapali and Ganapati Muni. Thereupon Ganapati Muni remarked to Ramana, "So this experience was as Jnana Sambandar". Ramana merely asserted, "Yes, yes" and passed on to a different topic.

7. The Mahaswami of Kanchi Kamakoti *math* once said to a devotee that Ramana who came to uplift *jnana yoga* was the same as the one who earlier was Kumarila Bhatta.

The above points may not be indisputable but considered in their totality give the impression that Bhagavan was an *avatar* of Skanda and that he was the form of Jnana Sambandar and Kumarila Bhatta.

Unlike most *avatars* who came for the elimination of evil-doers this *avatar* was for imparting knowledge. What

is the purpose of this *avatar*? Buddha appeared at a time when the *Upanishadic* injunction that 'all was Brahman' fell into disuse. His disciples propagated the idea that everything was *sunya*. To reestablish the primacy of Brahman Sankara came. But Sankara's view that what was visible was 'maya' could not be experienced and became a mere theory. Ramana's *avatar* was to complete the attempt of Sankara. He adopted the path of 'self-enquiry' and through it established the reality of Brahman. He showed that the *Atma*, the World and Brahman were in fact the same. By abiding in the *turiyateeta* state he established its practicable nature. Ramana's advent was for the upliftment of people of different spiritual attainments.

As Kumarila he established the supremacy of the *karma marga*, as Jnana Sambandar, a poet, he brought *bhakti marga* close to the people and as Ramana he showed that the purpose of life was to abide in the Self and to stay in the *sahaja* state by the *jnana marga*. Truly wonderful!

DEDICATION

1. You arose at the *kshetra* of Kaundinya, on the banks of the river Kaundinya, accept this, O Ramana, however, imperfect, written by one of the Kaundinya *gotra**

2. Jnana Sambandar chose the medium of poetry but could it be adequate? I do not grieve that I am no poet when you, as an embodiment of compassion abide as my Father, my Lord, Ramana.

3. Is it fair to brush aside one who writes what he knows on the ground that what he does not know is much more?

4. Oh you readers of goodwill, you very well know that pure unadulterated milk even if little is better than large quantities of adulterated milk.

Sri Ramanarpanam

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* Sri Krishna Bhikshu belonged to the Kaundinya *gotra*.

Appendix

Tiruchuzhi Sundara Mandiram

THE family house at Tiruchuzhi where Bhagavan was born had to be sold in 1895 to clear debts. After changing several hands it came in 1934 in to the possession of the Tiruchuzhi Nadar Sangha. The Sangha ran a School the teachers of which were housed there.

Some devotees felt that the house where Bhagavan was born was a sacred place and that it would be preferable to be acquired by Sri Ramanasrmam. There were several obstacles to the purchase of the building as it was a Trust property. Finally the *Sarvadhikari*, Niranjananada Swami stayed at Madurai for a couple of months in 1944 and succeeded in purchasing it. The idea was to name it 'Ramana Mandiram' but Bhagavan pointed out "What do people of Tiruchuzhi know who Ramana is? They knew and respected father and mother. So let it be named 'Sundara Mandiram'."

Truly so. Sundaram Iyer was well known as a generous host. He was widely respected. Even robbers held him in great respect. Once some robbers surrounded the cart of a magistrate but when the 'Vakil Sir' arrived at the spot accidentally, they left quietly and the magistrate escaped unharmed.

On the appointed day, 13 September 1944, devotees from all over India arrived at Tiruchuzhi. The elders of the town received the *Sarvadhikari* and others with due honours and took them to the Bhoominatheswara Temple for performing worship there.

In the evening the pictures of Bhagavan and his parents were taken in a procession in the town and just as in the case of the *utsava moortis* of the temple, appropriate *poojas* were performed to the pictures. The pictures were later kept in the 'Sundara Mandiram.' From then on regular *poojas* are being performed there and in due course facilities for the stay of visitors were also provided. For Bhagavan's devotees Sundara Mandiram has became a holy shrine.